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The story of Jesus and the skull in Arabic literature:  
the emergence and growth of a religious tradition

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## THE STORY OF JESUS AND THE SKULL IN ARABIC LITERATURE: THE EMERGENCE AND GROWTH OF A RELIGIOUS TRADITION\*

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### Introduction

Various traditions and legends about the characters of the Old and the New Testament are frequently mentioned in all the genres of Muslim literature and are attested in all the languages of the Muslim world. The main peculiarities of these traditions have been dealt with in many studies ranging from the Qur'ān itself to the most recent literary examples of the particular genre dedicated to the topic, the "Stories of the Prophets" (*qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*).<sup>1</sup> However, it should not be forgotten that this medieval and modern literary history is not the final word on the topic. The success of these stories in the Muslim world is further underlined by a continuous oral tradition and literary activity which adapted classical reports to popular tastes, reshaping their contents and introducing new ones.<sup>2</sup> In this regard, numerous libraries in the world preserve unpublished manuscripts including unknown late medieval collections of stories of the prophets and, most interestingly, single works dedicated to one prophet or one episode in the life of a prophet. Surprisingly enough, the products of this re-elaboration have been almost completely ignored by scholars.<sup>3</sup>

\*I am indebted to Meir Bar-Asher for his comments on a draft of this paper read at the colloquium "From Jāhiliyya to Islam" (Jerusalem, July 2000); to Etan Kohlberg, Joseph Sadan and Giovanni Canova for their invaluable comments on the final version of this article, and to Michael Robertson who revised the English translation.

<sup>1</sup> See R. Tottoli, *The Biblical Prophets in the Qur'ān and Muslim Literature* (Richmond, 2002), and the bibliography mentioned there.

<sup>2</sup> Various works have collected oral Muslim traditions about the Biblical characters. One of the most significant is J. Knappert, *Islamic Legends: Histories of the Heroes, Saints and Prophets of Islam* (Leiden, 1985), pp. 23–184.

<sup>3</sup> While it is a fact that the traditions about the prophets attested in classical works such as those of al-Ṭabarī, al-Tha'labī, al-Kisā'ī and others have been the subject of many studies, there are fewer studies of the late medieval and early modern versions of these stories in Arabic literature (mainly manuscripts). Of some significance in this regard is the approach of H. Schwarzbaum, *Biblical and Extra-Biblical Legends in Islamic Folk-Literature* (Walldorf-Hessen, 1982). See also the collection of some of his essays in *Jewish Folklore Between East and West* (Beer-Sheva, 1989). Joseph is the most popular figure in the few studies about the later versions of literature about the prophets. See, for instance, the poems published by R.Y. Ebied and M.J.L. Young, *The Story of Joseph in Arabic Verse. Leeds Arabic Manuscript 347* (Leiden, 1975); F. Croisier, *L'histoire de Joseph d'après un manuscrit oriental* (Genève, 1989). F.A. Pennacchietti has recently reproduced the original Arabic, translated and dis-

One of the most widespread stories attested in this regard is the "story of Jesus and the skull." This story describes how Jesus came across a skull and called it back to life, and how this skull described to Jesus, according to most of the versions, its descent to Hell. The diffusion of this story in Muslim literature has been the subject of some previous studies that touched upon various literary versions of it or proposed a preliminary description and interpretation of its origin. The first translation of a long Arabic version of the story can be found, without any explanation or indication of its exact source, in the collection of stories about the prophets edited by G. Weil in 1845.<sup>4</sup> V. Chauvin gave a description and discussion of it relying upon the versions traced back to Wahb b. Munabbih (died ca. 710 A.D.), quoted in the *Sirāj al-mulūk* of al-Ṭurṭūshī (d. 1126).<sup>5</sup> The work of al-Ṭurṭūshī also emerges as one of the favored sources in the comprehensive contribution of M. Asín Palacios, who included five different versions of the story, in Arabic and Latin translation, and tried for the first time to find some possible parallels in Christian traditions, mentioning the stories of Macarius and Arsenius.<sup>6</sup> The contribution of Asín Palacios is no doubt the first treatment of the story that displays a consciousness of the wide range of its Arabic versions and also attempts to identify a Christian origin for it or for some of its elements. Later, various other contributions, written by G. Levi Della Vida, W. Boutros Ghali, R. Basset and C.E. Padwick appeared, but these included only translations of other long versions of the story with no further commentary or analysis.<sup>7</sup> J. Robson translated two of the versions

cussed a text about the story of Susan. See *Susanna nel deserto. Riflessi di un racconto biblico nella cultura arabo-islamica* (Torino, 1998); a brief translation of a manuscript about Solomon is given by G. Canova, "La leggenda della Regina di Saba con una nota sul MS. ar. 270 dell'Ambrosiana," *Quaderni di Studi Arabi* 5-6 (1987-88): 105-119.

<sup>4</sup>G. Weil, *Biblical Legends of the Mussulmans* (London, 1846) (German ed. 1845), pp. 221-226. A recension of a version in Aljamiado is included in F. Guillen Robles, *Leyendas moriscas* (Madrid, 1885), I, pp. 159-170, and more recently in A. Vespertino Rodríguez, *Leyendas aljamiadas y moriscas sobre personajes bíblicos* (Madrid, 1983), pp. 342-348.

<sup>5</sup>V. Chauvin, *La récitation égyptienne des Mille et Une Nuits* (Bruxelles, 1899), pp. 75-76, where he added a few observations about some Arabic manuscripts from Gotha and Berlin, and concluded that, "Wahb n'a pas seulement suivi un prototype juif, mais qu'il a aussi utilisé les évangiles apocryphes." Relying on some additional sources, he also mentioned Hindustani, Persian and Georgian versions.

<sup>6</sup>M. Asín Palacios, "Logia et agrapha Domini Jesu apud Moslemicos scriptores, asceticos praesertim, usitata," *Patrologia Orientalis* (Paris), XIII, fasc. 3, no. 64, (1917): 423-431. Al-Ṭurṭūshī is also the source quoted by L. Cheikho, who confined himself to the simple reproduction of the Arabic text taken from his *Sirāj al-mulūk*; see his "Quelques légendes islamiques apocryphes," *Mélanges de la Faculté orientale de l'Université Saint Joseph* 4 (1910): 44. A connection between the story of Jesus and the story of the Egyptian ascetic St. Macarius is also maintained by A. Bausani, "Note sulla struttura della 'hikayat' classica malese," *Annali dell'Istituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli* 12 (1962): 186 (English edition: *Notes on the Structure of the Classical Malay Hikayat*, trans. L.F. Brakel, Monash Working Papers, no. 16, [Melbourne, 1979], p. 61).

<sup>7</sup>W. Boutros Ghali, *Les Perles éparpillées* (Paris, 1919), pp. 17-35; G. Levi Della Vida, "Gesù e il teschio," *Bilychnis* 9 (1923): 196-201, repr. with addenda in *Aneddoti e svaghi arabi e non arabi*, (Milano - Napoli 1959) (cited version), pp. 162-169; Levi Della Vida mentions the hypotheses of Asín Palacios about its possible Christian origin; R. Basset, *Mille et un contes, récits et légendes*, III. Légendes religieuses (Paris, 1926), pp. 171-7; C.E. Padwick, "The Nebi 'Isa and the Skull," *The Muslim World* 20 (1930): 56-62.

first edited by Asín Palacios, while D. Sidersky hinted briefly at the story and added some general considerations about probable Christian or Jewish influences.<sup>8</sup> A French translation of the version first published in German by G. Weil was given in a short but significant article by A.H. Krappe, who supported the Christian origin of the story, while introducing another element: the analogy of the story of Jesus and the skull with the legend of Pope Gregory and the Emperor Trajan.<sup>9</sup> Finally, others, such as M. Hayek, L. Massignon, R.G. Khoury, J. Knappert, A. Schimmel, and most recently T. Khalidi, either translated the already edited versions of the story or referred to its existence.<sup>10</sup> Thus, knowledge of the Arabic literary tradition concerning this story has been limited largely to the published versions of al-Ṭurṭūshī and Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣbahānī (d. 1038). These, together with the material published by Asín Palacios, are the only sources used in Islamic studies during the twentieth century. In recent times, F.A. Pennacchietti and M. Bernardini made valuable contributions to the story of Jesus and the skull, though the works in which they are found are not particularly devoted to Arabic literature. Pennacchietti first directed his attention to the neo-Aramaic versions preserving Christian poetical versions of the story from northern Iraq, giving transcriptions and translations of two of them in two different articles.<sup>11</sup> In another study, Pennacchietti translated the poem

<sup>8</sup>J. Robson, *Christ in Islam* (London, 1929), pp. 102-7; D. Sidersky (*Les origines des légendes musulmanes dans le Coran et dans les vies des prophètes* [Paris, 1933], p. 148) limited himself to quoting the story in a few lines - wrongly attributed to al-Kisā'ī (see below, pp. 14-15) - and stated that the details about Hell and its sectors are taken from the apocryphal *Apocalypse of Peter*. T. Andrae (*In the Garden of Myrtles: Studies in Early Islamic Mysticism*, trans. B. Sharpe [Albany, 1987], p. 21) mentioned only the brief version from the *Hilyat al-awliyā'* of Abū Nu'aym, simply stating that the story "may have been taken from late Christian Apocrypha or from Jewish Haggada."

<sup>9</sup>A.H. Krappe, "Un parallèle oriental de la légende de l'Empereur Trajan et du Pape Grégoire le Grand," *Le Moyen Age* 27 (1926): 85-92. I am indebted to F.A. Pennacchietti for this reference.

<sup>10</sup>M. Hayek, *Le Christ de l'Islam* (Paris, 1959), pp. 199-202, 205-206, 212, where he translates the traditions published by Asín Palacios and the short version taken from the *Hilya* of Abū Nu'aym; J. Knappert, *Islamic Legends*, I, pp. 174-76: only translation of one version; A. Schimmel, *Jesus und Maria in der islamischen Mystik* (München, 1996), p. 90: she translates the same short story from Abū Nu'aym and quotes the *Jumjuma-nāma* of Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār; the story is only briefly mentioned by L. Massignon, *Parole donnée* (Paris, 1967), p. 380, and R.G. Khoury, *Wahb b. Munabbih* (Wiesbaden, 1972), I, p. 253. T. Khalidi, *The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature* (Cambridge, MA - London, 2001), pp. 154-8 no. 186, pp. 181-2 no. 234 and pp. 189-90 no. 248; Khalidi translates and briefly comments upon three versions of the story: one from Abū Nu'aym's *Hilya*, one from al-Ghazālī's *Ihya'* and one from al-Ṭurṭūshī's *Sirāj al-mulūk*. In his comments he quotes another work in which versions of the story are quoted: Ḥ. Maṣṣūr, "Aqwāl al-Sayyid al-Masīh 'inda 'l-kuttāb al-muslimīn al-aqdamīn," *al-Masarra* (1976): 45-51, 115-22, 231-9, 356-64; (1977): 107-113; (1978): 45-53, 119-123, 221-5, 343-6, 427-32, 525-8, 608-11.

<sup>11</sup>F.A. Pennacchietti, "La versione neoaramaica di un poema religioso caldeo in lingua curda," in *Yād-Nāma: In memoria di Alessandro Bausani*, ed. B. Scarcia Amoretti and L. Rostagno (Roma, 1991), II, pp. 169-183. Idem, "La leggenda islamica del teschio redivivo in una versione neoaramaica," in *Semitic and Cushitic Studies*, ed. G. Goldenberg and S. Raz (Wiesbaden, 1994), pp. 103-131; the version is taken from MS London, British Library, Or. 4422. In this last article, introducing the Christian Arabic and Syriac versions, Pennacchietti also presented some useful considerations and included a bibliography about the diffusion of the story in Central Asian languages and in Turkish popular tradition as a result of the spread and translation of the *Jumjuma-nāma* of Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār.

*Jumjuma-nāma* of 'Aṭṭār,<sup>12</sup> and touched upon the "probable sources of the legend in Christian oriental hagiography," drawing some parallels to the Muslim story from the legends about the Christian saints Macarius the Great, Pisen-tius, George, Macarius from Antioch and Arsenius the Great.<sup>13</sup> Pennacchietti also published the transcription and translation of a version in verse preserved in Gotha and recently dealt with a Georgian version of the story.<sup>14</sup> Bernardini drew attention to the diffusion of the story from the *Jumjuma-nāma* of 'Aṭṭār in the Turkish milieu, giving a comprehensive description of the various versions and discussing previous literature dealing with them.<sup>15</sup> In a further study, he discussed the studies of the *Jumjuma-nāma* of 'Aṭṭār and, most importantly, cast doubt upon its attribution through a comparison with other versions of the story from Turkish and Central Asian traditions; he suggested that the poem was probably translated from an original Turkish version.<sup>16</sup>

In most of these contributions, and in particular in the later ones by Pennacchietti and Bernardini, a certain prominence is given —and rightly so— to the question of the origin of the Muslim story of Jesus and the skull. Literary and oral legends, especially of Christian saints or iconographic motifs from Central Asia, undoubtedly bear common features. The elaboration of the story within the Muslim tradition is a question of equal importance. In this regard, the study of the Arabic literary sources is a necessary first step, but this has been limited so far to the use of a few published sources. Hence, I shall first discuss the occurrence of this story or of its elements in early literature; then I shall describe the contents and the most important elements of its various versions in later manuscripts, in order to follow its development. While doing this, I shall not attempt to explain the origin of this story, but rather concentrate on its growth in Arabic Muslim literature.

<sup>12</sup>F. A. Pennacchietti, "Il racconto di Giomgiomé di Faridoddin Attār e le sue fonti cristiane," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 62 (1996): 89–112.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., pp. 104–109. A first discussion of the peculiarities of Muslim and Christian versions of the story had already been given in his "Il parallelo islamico di un singolare episodio della passione di San Giorgio," *Bollettino della Società per gli Studi Storici, Archeologici e Artistici della Provincia di Cuneo* 107/2 (1992): 101–110.

<sup>14</sup>F. A. Pennacchietti, "Gesù e Balwān bin Ḥafṣ bin Daylam, il sultano risuscitato," in *Studi Arabi e Islamici in memoria di Matilde Gagliardi*, ed. P. Branca and V. Brugnattelli (Milano, 1995), pp. 145–171; the manuscript is Gotha A 2212; and "S. Gregorio l'Illuminatore e il Re Gūmgūm," *Studi sull'Oriente Cristiano* 4/2 (2000): 119–138, in which he reproduced the Russian translation of the Georgian and translated it into Italian; he also mentioned here the existence of two Jewish versions in Arabic and Persian.

<sup>15</sup>M. Bernardini, "Solṭān Jomjome et Jésus le Paraclet," in *Les traditions apocalyptiques au tournant de la chute de Constantinople*, ed. B. Lellouch and S. Yerasimos, publ. Institut Français d'Études Anatoliennes Georges-Dunénil d'Istanbul (Paris, 1999), pp. 39–45.

<sup>16</sup>"Peregrinazioni letterarie turco-iraniche della leggenda del Sultano Jomjome," in *Medioevo romanzo e orientale: Il viaggio dei testi*, ed. A. Pioletti and F. Rizzo Nervo (Soveria Mannelli, 1999), pp. 97–115; he also analyzed some iconographical remains of Buddhist inspiration in Central Asia. These could point to the diffusion of the motif of a man and a skull in Central Asia before the spread of Islam. A work collecting revised versions of the articles by Pennacchietti, Bernardini and myself will soon appear in a volume dedicated to the Muslim versions of this story, along with a still unpublished paper by C. Brakel-Papenhuyzen dedicated to the Indonesian versions of the story and entitled "The Prophet Isa and the Skull: A Javanese version."

*The story of Jesus and the skull in Arabic literature  
until the end of the twelfth century*

A study of the introduction, spread and diffusion of the stories about the prophets (*qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*) in general and of the story of Jesus and the skull in particular is not an easy task. A historical reconstruction of the circulation of narratives is necessarily speculative for a number of reasons. First, literary occurrences are not always exhaustive since they are usually spread across distant places and periods; above all, not all of the early and most significant sources are still extant. Furthermore, the close but sometimes conflicting relationship between oral versions and written versions of the same narratives should not be underestimated. This relationship must have been important and constant, especially in the stories about the prophets and those legendary reports that had been among the favorites of storytellers since the advent of Islam,<sup>17</sup> but, unfortunately, this cannot be fully ascertained. In the case of the story of Jesus and the skull, the difficulties are even greater because the story is not mentioned in the early literary sources of the Muslim tradition.

In fact, despite its wide diffusion in late medieval and modern times, as attested by the existence of many manuscripts which will be discussed in the concluding section of this article, the Qur'ān does not mention this story. There is no reference to the story in pre-Islamic and early Islamic poetry either.<sup>18</sup> The word *jumjuma* does not appear in Wensinck's *Concordance* in connection with the story of Jesus and the skull. This is also the case in the most ancient Qur'ānic commentaries, at least from Muqātil b. Sulaymān (d. 767) to al-Ṭabarī (d. 923), where the story of Jesus and the skull is not mentioned among the miracles performed by Jesus. Neither does al-Tha'labī (d. 1027) include the story in his *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, which is the major work of this genre. Nevertheless, the story was surely known in the eleventh century A.D.: Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣbahānī included two versions of it in his major work *Ḥilyat al-awliyā'*.<sup>19</sup>

These two versions, one of which is significantly longer than the other, are completely different and are introduced by two *isnāds* leading to Ka'b al-Aḥbār (d. 656 A.D.). Ka'b was a Jewish convert to Islam. He is credited with spreading stories about the prophets and Biblical traditions in general among the Muslims of the first generation. An enormous number of reports are attributed to him, so much so that it is not possible to identify with certainty those stories that could rightly be attributed to him, assuming that there really is authentic material dating from his time.<sup>20</sup> Difficulties of this kind suggest that reliance should be

<sup>17</sup>See Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets*, pp. 86–89.

<sup>18</sup>I thank Prof. A. Arazi and the *Concordance of Early Arabic Poetry* of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem for providing me with references to *jumjuma* in Jāhili and early Islamic poetry.

<sup>19</sup>Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣbahānī, *Ḥilyat al-awliyā' wa-ṭabaqāt al-aṣfiyā'* (Cairo, n.d.), vol. 6, p. 10–12.

<sup>20</sup>It cannot be assumed that the reports quoted by Abū Nu'aym were known to Ka'b and the Muslims in the first half of the seventh century. Regarding Ka'b al-Aḥbār, see Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets*, pp. 89–92 and the bibliography cited there. The questions of his historical role and the material traced back to him must be treated separately. About his involvement in the spread of Jewish materials and conceptions at the time of the first conquests, see U. Rubin,

placed, in this particular case, upon the dating of the written sources instead of upon the much more controversial basis of relying on the names of the early transmitters, such as Ka'b.<sup>21</sup> However, the longer version included by Abū Nu'aym in his *Ḥilya* suggests some further considerations in connection to its *isnād*. Among the names found in the *isnād* (which goes back to Ka'b) is that of Ishāq b. Bishr (d. 821 A.D.), who was the author of one of the first collections of stories about the prophets, entitled *Mubtada' al-dunyā wa-qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*. There can be no doubt about the existence of this work, since a number of incomplete manuscripts of it have survived. Unfortunately, these manuscripts, including the most relevant one covering more than two hundred folios, contain only the introductory part of the story, from the Creation to the story of Abraham; hence, the chapter on Jesus, where the story of Jesus and the skull would be expected to appear, is not included.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, there is no reason to doubt this attribution, since Ibn Bishr is not a transmitter of the first Muslim generations, but a well-known author whose work is not only partially extant, but also devoted to a topic which could easily include a story about Jesus.<sup>23</sup> A certain methodological caution is necessary: we must consider

*Between Bible and Qur'ān: The Children of Israel and Islamic Self-Image* (Princeton, 1999), pp. 13–18. A few manuscripts ascribe to Ka'b al-Aḥbār (see F. Sezgin, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums* [= GAS], [Leiden, 1967], I, pp. 304–5 and F.M. Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins* [Princeton, 1998], p. 156) various works dealing with Alexander the Great, the death of Moses, Dhū 'l-Kiḥl, etc., which are hard to accept as having been written by Ka'b. It is far more probable that these manuscripts — which I was unable to consult — consist of traditions or collections of traditions attributed to him in medieval times, when his name became closely associated with these topics.

<sup>21</sup>This attitude is not related to any doubts about the possibility of dating traditions by means of the *isnāds*. My purpose is to trace, if possible, the diffusion of this story and its growth in a period much later than that in which a discussion of the transmitters can be significant. The discussion about the dating of traditions by means of *isnāds* tracing them back to figures and transmitters of the first Muslim generations or to Muḥammad himself, is undoubtedly the question *par excellence* in Islamic studies. For a comprehensive description of the status *questionis* and the contrasting views, see H. Berg, *The Development of Exegesis in Early Islam: The Authenticity of Muslim Literature From the Formative Period* (London, 2000), pp. 6–111.

<sup>22</sup>The *isnād* given by Abū Nu'aym is: Aḥmad b. al-Sanādī — al-Ḥasan b. 'Alwiyya al-Qaṭṭān — Ismā'īl b. 'Isā al-'Aṭṭār — Ishāq b. Bishr Abū Ḥudhayfa — Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh al-Baṣrī and 'Amir b. 'Abd Allāh, *shaykh* of the people of Nahr Tīrā — Ka'b al-Aḥbār. The tradition is partially translated by Khalidī, *The Muslim Jesus*, pp. 154–7, no. 186. Regarding Ibn Bishr, see Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets*, pp. 170–174 and the sources mentioned there. The most significant manuscript is preserved in Oxford (MS Bodleian, Huntington 388), and consists of more than 200 folios; the other manuscripts (see Sezgin, *GAS*, I, p. 294: two in Damascus) are much shorter and include chapters from the first part of the book; these are included also in the Oxford version. Attention was first drawn to the existence of this manuscript by M.J. Kister in "Adam: A Study of Some Legends in *Tafsīr* and *Ḥadīth* Literature," in *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'ān*, ed. A. Rippin (Oxford, 1988), p. 82 (then in *Israel Oriental Studies* 13 (1993): 113–4).

<sup>23</sup>The question at issue is the reliability of the attribution of books to authors of the first 150 years in the history of Islam. An author such as Ibn Bishr, who died in 206 A.H./821 A.D., already belongs to a period in which such doubts are rare. In his "On Mūsā b. 'Uqba's Kitāb al-Maghāzī" (*Acta Orientalia* 21 [1953]: 288–300, at p. 289), Schacht rejects the reliability of *isnāds* going back to an author, Mūsā b. 'Uqba, who lived in the first half of the second century A.H., saying that "an *isnād* cannot guarantee the authenticity of a work ascribed to an

the possibility that Abū Nu'aym himself might have attributed this story to Ibn Bishr, because of his authority in connection with stories about the prophets. I would, however, dismiss this possibility, because of the substantial reliability of the quotations in the *Ḥilya*, as shown by R.G. Khoury.<sup>24</sup> It can therefore be stated that the first version of this story, attested in a work written early in the eleventh century, most probably goes back to a work written at the beginning of the ninth.

The version attributed to Ishāq b. Bishr in Abū Nu'aym's *Ḥilya* is an extended one and is full of narrative details. It records that while passing by a *wādī*, Jesus met a time-worn skull and asked God to grant it permission to speak. God gave His permission and the skull told its story, recounting how death came upon it suddenly and how the Angel of Death caught its soul. Jesus asked the skull about its worst experiences and the skull recounted that two frightening angels had visited it in its grave and ordered the skull to write down what it had done in its lifetime. Beaten by angels and mauled by terrible animals, the skull described that it saw Hell and its seven doors opening upon different kinds of damned people, such as adulterers, those who dissipated the wealth of the orphans, the usurers and the idolaters worshipping a bull; all of them were suffering various kinds of punishment. The skull added that it was one of the worshippers of this bull and that its punishment had gone on for 94 years without respite, except on Thursdays and Fridays. The skull also revealed to Jesus that it lived at the time of Elijah and that a voice (from God) announced that it was permitted to leave Hell. Finally, the skull asked for Jesus' intercession and God brought it back to life.<sup>25</sup>

A number of elements in this story, in relation to later versions, must be emphasized: 1. The protagonist does not say anything about his human life; 2. There is no mention of Munkar and Nakīr, and the interrogation and torment in the grave are dealt with briefly; 3. The seven doors of Hell are described in detail, though there is no complete description of the punishments of the different categories of damned people.

Abū Nu'aym, however, includes in his *Ḥilya* a shorter version of a few lines that is also traced back to Ka'b. According to this version, Jesus came across a white skull and God, fulfilling his request, changed it into an old man with a packet of vegetables who asked him the way to the market. The old man then told him what he had been doing in the last moments of his life and the short story comes to a conclusion, adding that 500 years had passed between the old man's time and that of Jesus.<sup>26</sup> This is undoubtedly a tradition which

author of the early second century." But in the case of Ibn Bishr we are undoubtedly on firmer ground. Regarding Schacht's discussion of Mūsā b. 'Uqba, his scepticism has recently been rejected by G. Schoeler, in his "Mūsā b. 'Uqba's *Maghāzī*," in *The Biography of Muḥammad: The Issue of the Sources*, ed. H. Motzki (Leiden, 2000), pp. 67–97.

<sup>24</sup>See his "Importance et authenticité des textes de *Ḥilyat al-awliyā'* wa-ṭabaqāt al-aṣfiyā' d'Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣbahānī," *Studia Islamica* 46 (1977): 73–113.

<sup>25</sup>Abū Nu'aym, *Ḥilyat al-awliyā'*, vol. 6, pp. 10–12.

<sup>26</sup>Abū Nu'aym, *Ḥilyat al-awliyā'*, vol. 6, pp. 9–10, translated in Schimmel, *Jesus und Maria in der islamischen Mystik*, p. 90, and briefly discussed in Andrae, *In the Garden of Myrtles*, p. 21. The same tradition, including only a few orthographic variants, is also quoted by al-Zabidī, *Ithāf al-sāda al-muttaqīn*, (Cairo, n.d.) vol. 10, pp. 264f.



has nothing to do with the previous one, except for the mention of a skull encountered by Jesus.

It is necessary to underline at this point that Abū Nu'aym wrote during the eleventh century, by which time some of the most significant works in Arabic literature had already appeared. The two centuries dividing Ibn Bishr from Abū Nu'aym are in fact centuries of fervent literary activity in which some works which could have included versions of the story appeared. One of these is no doubt the booklet *Man 'āsha ba'd al-mawt* ("Those who lived after death") of Ibn Abī 'l-Dunyā (d. 894), which is wholly dedicated to tales and traditions of people, or other living beings, restored to life, and mentions a story in which Jesus brings Shem back to life.<sup>27</sup> As has already been mentioned, the major *tafsīrs* do not include the story of Jesus and the skull, nor does al-Tha'labī mention it in his *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*. The case of al-Tha'labī is the most significant in this regard: he wrote a work on the prophets which was larger than that of Ishāq b. Bishr and even dedicated a large section to the discussion of the miracles performed by Jesus.<sup>28</sup> This notwithstanding, he omits every mention of the story. It is not easy to explain his and the other authors' silence, since undoubtedly versions of the story were well known and widely spread; but this is a meaningful silence. These authors most probably chose to leave the story of Jesus and the skull out of their works, though in some other cases they do not refrain from quoting and using material dealing with miracles or prodigious acts by the prophets. Perhaps the existence and circulation of completely different versions of the motif of Jesus and the skull, i.e., not pointing to a definite episode in his life — such as the two in Abū Nu'aym's *Hilya* — is at the source of these authors' serious doubts about all these traditions and, in particular, about the motif itself.

As far as we know, Muslim Arabic literature does not include other versions of the story of Jesus and the skull until the beginning of the twelfth century. Nevertheless, the literature preserves some other traditions which are very closely connected to it. Some of them lack the narrative motif of a skull which is called back to life and talks about its previous life,<sup>29</sup> but mention some figures who came across a skull and found words written down nearby. These are the

<sup>27</sup>This book has been printed several times in various editions in the last few years. See, for example, the Dār al-Jīl edition (Beirut, 1994); on Shem's resurrection: p. 121.

<sup>28</sup>See the Italian translation of these parts in *Vita di Gesù secondo le tradizioni islamiche*, ed. R. Tottoli (Palermo, 2000), pp. 86–113.

<sup>29</sup>Some pertinent explanation of the terminology is in order. By the term "motif" — a term which has been dealt with extensively in classics of folklore and literary analysis — I mean the dominant literary subject of the story which constitutes the central idea or theme in all the versions discussed. By the term "element/elements," I mean the individual narrative components — i.e. the basic units of a plot — emerging in the various literary treatments of the motif. For example, the motif of the story is a "speaking skull that recounts its previous life," while an element attested in some versions would be that this skull was a powerful king, or, in another, that it visited Hell and described it. In the identification of the motif, I rely upon A. Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature* (Bloomington — Indianapolis, 1955–58), vol. 2, p. 426, who mentions motif E261.1.2 "speaking skull that recounts his previous life, reveals future events" (for other motifs with skulls, see vol. 6, p. 713). Reference to the existence of this motif in Arabic literature is given by Hasan M. El-Shamy, *Folk Traditions of the Arab World* (Bloomington — Indianapolis, 1995), vol. 1, p. 113, who relies on the story translated by Basset.

cases, for instance, of the skull bearing a written admonition subject of a tale recounted to Alexander the Great,<sup>30</sup> or of the skull being met by David when he went along a mountain track and found it on an iron throne along with its skeleton. This is quoted by the Shī'ī Ibn Bābawayh (d. 991); the skull originally belonged to a powerful king, and was located next to a table bearing various written texts.<sup>31</sup> Another version of this story, quoted in the Qur'anic commentary of al-Qummī (ninth century),<sup>32</sup> adds that David read the text dealing with the vanities of this world; then he reached the grave of Uriah, where he called him back to life, confessed to have been the cause of his death, and asked for forgiveness.<sup>33</sup>

Shī'ī literature has preserved some other significant traditions which state that 'Alī also encountered a skull and, moreover, he called it back to life to talk to it. It is again Ibn Bābawayh who includes the first report of this kind. According to a tradition quoted by him, while getting ready to pray, 'Alī came across a skull and asked to whom it had belonged. The skull answered that it had belonged to a king of an unspecified people and then told its story; 'Alī was so preoccupied with it that he missed the prescribed time of prayer.<sup>34</sup> Another

<sup>30</sup>(Pseudo)-al-Wāqidi, *Futūḥ al-Shām* (Beirut, n.d.), vol. 2, p. 51. A story about certain people who showed Alexander the Great some skulls and explained to him to whom they originally belonged, but which does not include any mention of written admonitions, is widely attested in Muslim literature; see, for example, Ibn Abī 'l-Dunyā, *Kitāb al-qubūr* (Medina, 2000), pp. 135–6, and Chauvin, *La récession égyptienne*, p. 61 no. 4; Id., *Bibliographie des ouvrages arabes ou relatifs aux Arabes* (Liège — Leipzig, 1902), vol. 6, p. 186.

<sup>31</sup>Shaykh Ṣādūq (Ibn Bābawayh), *al-Amālī* (Qom, 1362 A.H.), p. 99, with *isnād*: 'Alī b. Ibrāhīm b. Hāshim — his father — Muḥammad b. Abī 'Umayr — Hishām b. Ṣālim — Ṣādīq; it is written upon the table: "My name is Awrā b. Shalm, I ruled a thousand years, I built a thousand towns, I had a thousand virgins, until at the end of my life dust became my pallet, stone my pillow etc."; cf. al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* (Beirut, 1983), vol. 14, p. 25; Arwā Salm. The use of the number thousand is a constant element in later versions of the story of Jesus and the skull. See other versions also in Ibn Bābawayh, *Kamāl al-dīn* (Qom, 1395 A.H.), vol. 2, p. 525; Muḥammad b. Ḥasan Fattāl Nisābūrī, *Rawḍat al-wā'izīn* (Qom, n.d.), vol. 2, p. 442. This same story is mentioned — but with the inclusion of the head and not of the skull — by al-Ṭurtūshī, *Sirāj al-mulūk* (Cairo, 1994), vol. 2, p. 47 (and signalled by Chauvin, *La récession égyptienne*, p. 75 n. 2); cf. also Ibn Abī 'l-Dunyā, *Kitāb al-qubūr*, pp. 182–3.

<sup>32</sup>Regarding the dating of this Shī'ī commentary, see M.M. Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī Shiism* (Leiden — Jerusalem, 1999), pp. 33–35.

<sup>33</sup>Al-Qummī, *Tafsīr* (Beirut, 1991), p. 234, with the same *isnād*: Ibn Abī 'Umayr — Hishām — al-Ṣādīq; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 14, p. 22; al-Jazā'irī, *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* (Beirut, 1978), pp. 387–388.

<sup>34</sup>Shaykh Ṣādūq (Ibn Bābawayh), *ʿIlal al-Sharāʿi* (Qom, n.d.), vol. 2, p. 351, with *isnād*: al-Qaṭṭān — 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad al-Ḥasanī — Furāt b. Ibrāhīm — al-Fazārī — Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn — Muḥammad b. Ismā'il — Aḥmad b. Nūh and Aḥmad b. Hilāl — Ibn Abī 'Umayr — Ḥannān. See also in Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib al-Abī Ṭālib* (Qom, 1379 A.H.), vol. 2, p. 525; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 41, p. 166. E. Kohlberg drew my attention to the fact that this tradition is relevant because it combines two separate miracles by 'Alī: first conversing with the skull; second, forcing back the sun. According to this version, the first miracle is the trigger for the second. While the *radd al-shams* is the better-known miracle (cf. L. Capezzone, "Un miracolo di 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib," in *Studi in memoria di Francesco Gabrieli 1904–1996*, suppl. no. 2 to *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* 71 [1997]: 99–112), the combination of the two miracles is less common. On the miracles attributed to 'Alī and the imāms, see M. Amir-Moezzi, "Savoir c'est pouvoir: Exégèse et implications du miracle

version included in the encyclopedic *Bihar al-anwar* of al-Majlisi (d. 1698), and traced back to Ibn Babawayh, specifies the name and identity of the king.<sup>35</sup> An allusion to a Shi'i story of 'Ali and the skull is also found in some Sunni historiographical works about an episode which occurred at the beginning of the eleventh century. According to Ibn al-Jawzi (d. 1201) and other sources, following a revolt or a surprise attack in the year 420 A.H. (1029 A.D.), a deviant (from a Sunni perspective) invocation was used after a Friday *khutba* in a mosque. Apart from the historical situation, which is of no significance here, the content of this invocation is important. After the mention of the Prophet Muḥammad this group of fanatics added mention of "his brother" 'Ali, defined as the *amir al-mu'minin* and, among other attributes, "the skull's interlocuter" (*mukallim al-jumjuma*).<sup>36</sup>

Much more significant are the two traditions quoted by Shādhān b. Gabr'īl in his *Faḍā'il*, a work written in the second half of the twelfth century, i.e., two centuries after Ibn Babawayh. In the first tradition, 'Ali, after his arrival in Chosroes' palace in Ctesiphon, saw a worn skull and ordered his followers to bring it to him along with a basin. 'Ali put the skull in the basin, swore and commanded it to speak. The skull started talking fluently, recognized 'Ali and declared itself to be the king Chosroes Anushirwān, who had been a just and merciful Mazdean ruler. It had been king at the time of Muḥammad. Confirming the authenticity of the Prophet's mission, the skull regretted not having been converted, adding that if it were alive today, it would follow 'Ali.<sup>37</sup> Though D. Aigle (Louvain — Paris, 2000), pp. 251–286.

<sup>35</sup>Ibn Babawayh also gives the name of the king, al-Julanda b. Karkar, adding that he was the Skull Mosque (*masjid al-jumjuma*) in that place: al-Majlisi, *Bihar al-anwar*, vol. 41, p. 211. Cf. 'Ali b. Yunus Nabā'i, *al-Ṣirā' al-mustaqim* (Najaf, 1384 A.H.), vol. 1, p. 101 (and p. 103 for a brief mention), in which, it is said that, among the miracles 'Ali performed, he also called al-Julanda, the Abyssinian king, back to life. A *Masjid al-jumjuma* is also mentioned in Ibn Shahrashūb, *Manaqib al-Abī Ṭālib*, vol. 2, p. 200. No other sources attest that al-Julanda was another name of Abrahā. The name al-Julanda is mentioned in different contexts; see, for instance, R. Tottoli, "The *Qisas al-anbiya'* of Ibn Muḥarrir al-Jāfārī: Stories of the Prophets from al-Andalus," *al-Qanariya* 19 (1998): 150, n. 97; and J.C. Wilkinson, "The Julanda of Oman," *Journal of Oman Studies* 1 (1975): 97–108. E. Kohlberg drew my attention to another interesting detail mentioned in Nabā'i, *al-Ṣirā' al-mustaqim*, vol. 1, p. 101, where it is stated that there is a famous *mashhad* in Babil, probably at the spot where the meeting with the skull took place. "This would strengthen the likelihood that it occurred after Muḥammad's death, most likely during 'Ali's rule.

<sup>36</sup>Ibn al-Jawzi, *al-Muntaẓam fi ta'rikh al-mulūk wa-l-umam* (Beirut, 1992), vol. 8, p. 42, *al-ammal*, the divine human being (*al-bashar al-ilahi*) and the one who talked to "Those where the invocation also adds: "...the one who called back to life the dead ones (*mulayy* al-Dhahabi, *al-Ibar fi khabar man ghabar* (al-Kuwayt, 1948), vol. 3, p. 136.

<sup>37</sup>Chosroes directly states that he was forbidden to enter Paradise because of his unbelief, but that he also escaped Hell because of his just behavior; see Shādhān b. Gabr'īl, *Faḍā'il al-majlis*, 1363 A.H.), p. 71, with the *isnad*: Abu 'I-Abīwa — his father — 'Ammar al-Sabā'i; see also al-Majlisi, *Bihar al-anwar*, vol. 41, pp. 213–214; and Muḥaddith al-Nūr, *Mustadrak al-Qom*, 1408 A.H.), vol. 18, pp. 168–9, with this *isnad* at the beginning: from the Kitab 'uyun al-mu'jizat, from the Kitab al-anwar of Abu 'Ali 'I-Ḥasan b. Hammām and so forth.

the principal aim of this report is to confirm that 'Ali performed miracles such as this and to prove the fairness of his claims, an important detail here is that once again, the skull is identified as a king.

Shādhān quotes another tradition under the title "the story of the skull." This report is traced back to a certain al-Maghribī who recounts that he accompanied 'Ali, while 'Ali was preparing to fight Mu'awiya. 'Ali saw a worn skull on the shore of the Euphrates; he addressed it and it answered with an invocation to God and then started talking fluently. 'Ali told the skull to be silent, and then returned to it a second time after the battle of Nahrawān (658). He showed the worn skull to the people who had gathered with him and ordered them to bring it to him. Then he moved the skull with his lash and told it to tell them its entire story. The skull's narrative includes some elements that appear later in versions of the story of Jesus and the skull: 1. The protagonist (in this case 'Ali) asks the skull if during its lifetime it was poor or rich, king or subject, etc.; 2. The skull belonged to Parwiz b. Hurmuz, an evil but powerful king, and his riches and victories are described by the thousand; he had conquered a thousand towns, he had killed a thousand other sovereigns etc.; 3. The Angel of Death visited him and took his soul, he was condemned to Hell and entrusted to the angels named *zabāniya*,<sup>38</sup> who struck him with staffs of fire, and to the torment of scorpions and snakes. When finally the skull stopped talking, all those present broke into tears and confessed their bad behavior towards 'Ali.<sup>39</sup>

The similarity between the reports about Jesus and those about 'Ali is striking. It is thus highly probable that there is some relationship between the various reports or, alternatively, that all those collecting and quoting a tradition about Jesus or 'Ali were aware of the existence of versions involving the other.<sup>40</sup> The use of traditions about Biblical prophets by Shi'is is well-known, but the transposition of narrative motifs about these Biblical prophets to the figure of 'Ali or the Imams, as in this case, has never been dealt with comprehensively.<sup>41</sup> However, the hypothesis of an exchange between the two sides seems to

<sup>38</sup>See Qur'an 96:18.

<sup>39</sup>Shādhān, *Faḍā'il*, pp. 72–73, with the *isnad*: Abu Rawḥa al-Ansārī — al-Maghribī; al-Majlisi, *Bihar al-anwar*, vol. 41, pp. 215–216.

<sup>40</sup>In more recent periods, in Muslim Turkish literature, this case has already been pointed out by Bernandini, "Söğütan Jomjome," p. 45, who attributes certain versions of the story of the skull to 'Ali and its adaptation to Muḥammad in another case. Bassett, *Mille et un contes*, vol. 3, p. 177, n. 2, states that in another source David is substituted for Jesus in the same story.

<sup>41</sup>Regarding the Shi'i interest in traditions about the Biblical prophets in the first centuries of Islam, see U. Rubin, "Prophets and Progenitors in Early Shi'a Tradition," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 1 (1979): 41–65, esp. p. 53: "The biographies of the previous prophets served as a model for 'Ali's own behaviour"; and p. 55: "In fact, the Shi'a seems to be responsible for the main flow of Judeo-Christian motifs into the Muslim literature already since the first century A.H." More cautious is E. Kohlberg, "Some Shi'i Views on the Antediluvian World," *Studia Islamica* 52 (1980): 41–66; see in particular p. 65, where he states: "The Shi'ization of the *Qisas* material occurred after Jewish and Christian works on Biblical figures had undergone an initial process of Islamization. An alternative theory would be that the Jewish and Christian traditions were integrated into the Shi'i system of thought without first going through a non-Shi'i Islamic phase. The obvious place for such putative integration would be Iraq."

be confirmed in another case involving Jesus. The reference is to the story of the resurrection of Shem, whom Jesus called back to life, fulfilling the requests of his followers who wanted to meet someone who lived during the Flood. This is widely quoted in both Sunnī<sup>42</sup> and Shīʿī sources.<sup>43</sup> Agreement between Shīʿī and Sunnī reports about prophets would not be relevant to our case, were it not for a few other Shīʿī reports which indicate that ʿAlī also called Shem back to life.<sup>44</sup> In this regard, a later work such as *al-Širāʿ al-mustaqīm* of ʿAlī b. Yūnus Nabāʿī (d. 1472) even refers to each of the miraculous resurrections performed by ʿAlī: "Alī called back to life Shem, Those of the Cave and the skull by God's permission."<sup>45</sup> That this passage is quoted in a chapter dealing with the miracles performed by the prophets, and quoted together with similar acts performed by ʿAlī, would seem to be another clear indication of a transposition of motifs from one part to the other.

Let us return to the story of Jesus and the skull. After Abū Nuʿaym, it is mentioned in the works of two well-known Sunnī authors, al-Ghazālī and al-Ṭurṭūshī. The first quotes a short version of the story in his *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*, where it is said that Jesus passed by a skull which, with God's permission, responded to Jesus' questions and indicated that he had been king of an un-

<sup>42</sup>Ibn Abī ʿl-Dunyā, see n. 27; al-Thaʿlabī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ al-musammā ʿArāʾ is al-majālis* (Cairo, 1954), p. 59; al-Tarafi, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, in R. Tottoli, *Le Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ di Tarafi*, (Ph.D. diss., Napoli, 1996), pp. 121–122; Anonymous, *Siyar al-anbiyāʾ*, MS London, British Library Or. 1510, f. 151a; Ibn Hishām, *Kitāb al-tijān fī mulūk Ḥimyar* (Šanʿā, n.d.), pp. 35–36; al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-arab fī funūn al-adab* (Cairo, 1929–1985), vol. 14, p. 229. Some *tafsīrs* quote the resurrection of Shem, along with other miracles and the invocation used by Jesus to perform them, commenting on Qurʾān 3:49; see al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr fī ʿl-tafsīr bi-ʿl-maʾthūr* (Beirut, 1983), vol. 2, p. 216.

<sup>43</sup>Shīʿī sources quote this miracle either in reports describing it or in reports where it is said that Shem was among the four persons called back to life by Jesus; see, in general, al-Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr* (Beirut, n.d.), vol. 1, p. 174, with an *isnād* from Muḥammad b. Abī ʿUmayr; Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib al-Abī Ṭālib*, vol. 1, p. 225; Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāwandī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* (Beirut, 1989), p. 269; id., *al-Kharāʾij wa-ʿl-jarāʾih* (Qom, 1409 A.H.), vol. 2, p. 949; al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār*, vol. 14, p. 233 (from al-Ayyāshī), p. 259 (from Wāḥb), vol. 16, p. 417, with *isnād*: Qatāda b. Rabaʿ — Muḥammad b. Maslama — ʿAbdallāh b. Unays — al-Kalbī.

<sup>44</sup>Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib al-Abī Ṭālib*, vol. 3, p. 248; al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār*, vol. 49, pp. 59, 72. It is interesting to note here that a few Sunnī reports identify Ḥām rather than Shem as the son of Noah who was called back to life; see al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān ʿan taʾwīl āy al-Qurʾān* (Cairo, 1968), vol. 12, pp. 35–36; Kaʿb Ḥām b. Nūḥ; idem, *Taʾrikh al-rusul wa-ʿl-mulūk*, ed. M.A. Ibrāhīm (Cairo, 1960f), vol. 1, p. 181 (= ed. M.J. de Goeje, Leiden, 1879–1901, I, p. 187); Ḥām b. Nūḥ. Some later Sunnī authors are also aware of these two variants. The first is Ibn al-Jawzī, who quotes them consecutively in his *al-Muntaẓam*, vol. 2, pp. 21–23. A first tradition identifying Shem as the person who was brought back to life, is introduced by the *isnād* used in the long tradition about Jesus and the skull in Abū Nuʿaym: (...) al-Ḥasan/Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī al-Qaṭṭān — Ismāʿīl b. ʿIsā al-ʿAṭṭār — Ishāq b. Bishr al-Qurashī — (...) Salmān al-Fārisī; the second mentions Ḥām and has an *isnād* which is different from that of al-Ṭabarī. Ibn Kathīr, for his part, mentions in his *al-Bidāya wa-ʿl-nihāya* (Beirut, 1990), vol. 1, p. 116, the name of Ḥām by citing the tradition from al-Ṭabarī, but then, in the chapter devoted to Jesus (vol. 2, p. 82), says that he has already dealt with this story in the chapter on Noah in which Jesus called Shem back to life.

<sup>45</sup>ʿAlī b. Yūnus Nabāʿī, *al-Širāʿ al-mustaqīm*, vol. 1, p. 103: *wa-ʿAlī aḥyā Sām wa-ahl al-kahf wa-ʿl-jumjuma bi-idhn Allāh*; and cf. p. 101: *wa-aḥyā[i.e. God] li-ʿAlī ahl al-kahf wa-ruwiya annahu aḥyā Sām b. Nūḥ wa-aḥyā lahu jumjumat al-Julandā*.

specified people, and suddenly died after being visited by the Angel of Death.<sup>46</sup> Al-Ghazālī quoted this brief report in a chapter devoted to the Angel of Death, among other traditions dealing with prophets. What is even more significant in this short report, which only loosely fits into the particular subject matter of the chapter in al-Ghazālī's work, is that for the first time the skull recounts that it originally belonged to a king. This identification as a king does not occur in the early versions of the story of Jesus and the skull, but only in those of ʿAlī and the skull.

This same element is also mentioned in both the versions of the story quoted in the *Sirāj al-mulūk* of al-Ṭurṭūshī. In the first one, Jesus met a worn skull during his journey and ordered it to speak. The skull identified itself as Balwām b. Ḥafs, a Yemenite king, who had lived one thousand years earlier, and had one thousand children and possessed one thousand virgins, etc. The second tradition says that Jesus met a huge and frightening skull and called it back to life in response to the insistence of his followers, and with God's permission. The skull said that it had been a king who lived for one thousand years, conquered one thousand towns, and then concluded its speech with some wise counsel.<sup>47</sup> Most significantly, in al-Ghazālī and al-Ṭurṭūshī's versions there are two new elements not mentioned in previous stories of Jesus and the skull, but only in those of ʿAlī and the skull: 1. The description of the power and actions of the king by listing of thousands; 2. The king has a name. Moreover, the appearance of Wāḥb b. Munabbih to whom both reports are traced back should be considered no less important. Wāḥb is a central figure in the spread and diffusion of traditions concerning Biblical prophets and stories, to the extent that he was reputedly the author of the first collection of *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, which unfortunately is not extant. We should allow for the possibility that the story of Jesus and the skull could have been included in Wāḥb b. Munabbih's stories of the prophets. But an evaluation of Wāḥb is more problematic: to assess the contents of his lost work is far more difficult than in the case of Ibn Bishr who wrote a century later. Our inability to reconstruct any of Wāḥb's works is further complicated by the fact that he came to be considered an ideal reference for stories and legends about Biblical prophets, very much like Kaʿb b. al-Aḥbār; the result is that an inordinate amount of reports are attributed to him.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>46</sup>This tradition is introduced with a generic *wa-ruwiya*: al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn* (Cairo, 1939), vol. 4, p. 448, quoted and translated in Asín Palacios, "Logia," p. 423. See also Hayek, *Le Christ de l'Islam*, p. 205 and Khalidī, *The Muslim Jesus*, pp. 181–2, n. 234.

<sup>47</sup>Al-Ṭurṭūshī, *Sirāj al-mulūk* (Cairo, 1994), vol. 1, pp. 69, 73, see also in Asín Palacios, "Logia," pp. 423–4, and the translation in Hayek, *Le Christ de l'Islam*, pp. 206–7; Khalidī, *The Muslim Jesus*, p. 189 n. 248. The first of these reports is introduced by a generic *wa-ruwiya fī ʿl-isrāʾiliyyāt anna ʿIsā...*; and is also given by L. Cheikho, "Quelques légendes," p. 44, but with a slightly different introduction: *jāʾa fī ʿl-isrāʾiliyyāt ʿan Wāḥb b. Munabbih qāla qaraʾtu fī kitāb baʿḍ al-anbiyāʾ*. This is translated by Zwemer, *The Moslem Christ*, p. 145. On the meaning of the term *isrāʾiliyyāt* and its use in al-Ṭurṭūshī, see R. Tottoli, "Origin and Use of the Term *isrāʾiliyyāt* in Muslim Literature," *Arabica* 46 (1999): 196–7.

<sup>48</sup>Regarding all these questions and Wāḥb in particular, see Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets*, 138–141, the bibliography quoted here, and, above all, the work of R. G. Khoury, *Wāḥb b. Munabbih* (Wiesbaden, 1972). The question of the works ascribed to Wāḥb in later literature is highly controversial. He was the author of several works, none of which is extant.



Another version of the story of Jesus and the skull is recorded in the unpublished *Zahrat al-riyāḍ wa-nuzhat al-qulūb al-mirād* of al-Saqṣinī, a work which the author himself states he wrote in Persian and then revised and translated into Arabic in 1155 A.D.<sup>49</sup> The version given by al-Saqṣinī is quite similar to those already discussed and has many points in common with that traced back to Ibn Bishr, though it is ascribed to Wahb and not to Ka'b. The story is as long and detailed as the later medieval sources, but includes some peculiar elements. In fact, in the case of al-Saqṣinī, we have a detailed version, but one that leaves out some elements already attested in previous versions and essential in later versions; most relevant in this regard is the omission of the lists of thousands. At the same time, al-Saqṣinī's version includes some other elements omitted in later medieval material.<sup>50</sup> This is an indication that in the middle of the twelfth century, a "definitive" version of the story of Jesus and the skull, including all the elements, had not yet been elaborated or deemed worthy of inclusion in literature.

There is one last question to be dealt with and it concerns al-Kisā'ī's *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*. His work collects many popular traditions which could include a story such as that of Jesus and the skull.<sup>51</sup> This could be the reason for a strange comment by D. Sidersky, who stated in his *Les origines des légendes musulmanes dans le Coran*, that a passage in al-Kisā'ī's work mentions a short version of the story of Jesus and the skull and draws some conclusions concerning its origin. Yet al-Kisā'ī does not mention a version of this story in his work, and it is impossible to explain what prompted Sidersky to make this statement.<sup>52</sup> But Sidersky's mistake seems to point unintentionally to a real problem in connection to al-Kisā'ī's stories of the prophets. The edition published in 1922–23 by I. Eisenberg is, in fact, incomplete, since it is based on a limited number

<sup>49</sup>See C. Brockelmann, *Geschichte des arabischen Litteratur* (Leiden, 1937–49), S. I, p. 776, and above all the rich information contained in the catalogue of the Arabic manuscripts of the Jewish National and University Library of Jerusalem, written by E. Wust, *Fihrist al-makhṭūṭāt al-'arabiyya fi majmū'at A.S. Yahuda* (Jerusalem, 1997), pp. 411f. n. 571. The manuscript of the work of al-Saqṣinī to which I make reference is MS Berlin Staatsbibliothek Petermann II 556, pp. 35–38, but I could also consult MS Jerusalem JNUL 571, ff. 16a–17b.

<sup>50</sup>These elements include: 1. A dialogue with the skull at the beginning, which has no parallel in other sources; 2. Death caught him suddenly, while he was drinking and not while he was bathing; 3. The visit of the Angel of Death is followed by that of his keeper (*raqīb*) showing a table upon which his acts are written; the keeper interrogates him about his religion and his Lord; 4. Before coming to Hell, he is taken to Paradise where he saw Adam, Noah and Abraham.

<sup>51</sup>Al-Kisā'ī, *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* (Leiden, 1922–23). (Eng. transl. by W.M. Thackston Jr., *The Tales of the Prophets of al-Kisā'ī* [Boston, 1978]. Both the identity of the author and the dating of the work are controversial questions (usually tenth–twelfth centuries). Regarding all these problems, see Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets*, pp. 151–155 and the sources mentioned in the bibliography.

<sup>52</sup>Sidersky, *Les origines des légendes*, p. 148, gives this story: while passing by the Dead Sea, Jesus met a skull and upon the request of his followers called it back to life; the skull took the shape of a living head and recounted its vicissitudes and its journey in the Hereafter. Sidersky then refers to al-Kisā'ī, *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, ed. Eisenberg, p. 307. As mentioned above, this reference makes no sense: on p. 307 of Eisenberg's edition the resurrection of Shem is mentioned, while on the following page some other miraculous resurrections performed by Jesus are mentioned, but they have no connection with skulls.

of manuscripts. J. Pauliny has studied some of these manuscripts and, in a comprehensive article, listed the various chapters of the work attested in the various versions he considered, demonstrating that the text included in some of these manuscripts is far longer than that edited by Eisenberg. In any case, the list given by Pauliny mentions only a "Story of the skull and Solomon" (*Ḥadīth al-jumjuma ma'a Sulaymān*) and contains no chapter about Jesus and the skull.<sup>53</sup>

As a partial conclusion to the first part of this article and in view of the material discussed, it can be stated that the versions found in Arabic literature until the end of twelfth century, that is, the period when Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār supposedly wrote his *Jumjuma-nāma* (ca. 1220 A.D.), contain the main elements encountered in later versions. These elements are: 1. The two main transmitters of the story, i.e., Ka'b and Wahb, are also the most important names in stories about Biblical prophets in Muslim traditions; 2. The protagonist, the skull interrogated by Jesus, was in its lifetime a king, whose power and wealth are vividly described; 3. The skull recounts its trip to the Hereafter and the punishment it had to bear in Hell. These elements, though all attested in the various sources, are not yet included in *one complete version*. A few elements secondary to the plot are missing, such as the description of the good nature of the king,<sup>54</sup> which, in later sources, is the reason why God granted him life again and enabled him to become a true believer. Therefore, according to the evidence discussed, the centuries leading up to the twelfth century were a period of literary elaboration of the story of Jesus and the skull in Arabic literature which had not yet come to an end. This elaboration began most probably no later than the beginning of the ninth century.

The circulation of an equivalent elaboration of the same motif on the Shī'ī side seems to have had an important role in the development of the versions of the story of Jesus and the skull, though in these versions 'Alī was the protagonist instead of Jesus. According to the literary evidence discussed, an exchange of attributions and elements between the two stories is the probable explanation of their similarities, with more and more composite versions emerging between the ninth and the twelfth centuries. For instance, it is noteworthy that the first version traced back to Ibn Bishr contains the eschatological element while it omits every detail about the lifetime of the man to whom the skull belonged. It also does not say that it was a king, as stated in the versions quoted by

<sup>53</sup>Pauliny, "Kisā'īs Werk *Kitāb Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*," *Graecolatina et orientalia* (Bratislava), 2 (1970): 275, n. 123. Nevertheless, among the manuscripts of al-Kisā'ī's stories of the prophets, I was able to find at least one including this story. This is MS Leiden Or. 14027 (ff. 130b–131b), consisting of a reworking of al-Kisā'ī's *Qīṣaṣ* in which a *ḥadīth* 'Isā wa-'l-jumjuma comes after a chapter on Mattā al-Ḥawārī. In this chapter, a long tradition is traced back to Wahb b. Munabbih while a brief one is ascribed to Wahb together with Ka'b. In view of the peculiarities of this late manuscript (eighteenth century) and the level of its reworking, it is impossible to suggest that the chapter about Jesus and the skull could belong to the original and older core – if an original core can be detected – of al-Kisā'ī's stories of the prophets. It is, no doubt, a later addition for which I am unable to give a precise date though the contents of these versions are quite similar to the late medieval versions discussed below.

<sup>54</sup>This element, it should not be forgotten, is inserted in the motif with the story of 'Alī who talked to the skull of Chosroes; see above, p. 16.

al-Ghazālī and al-Ṭurṭūshī (at the beginning of the twelfth century). Instead, a name and description of the wealth and power of the king emerge immediately from the Shīʿī sources, which are the first to introduce an eschatological element, together with a later tradition quoted by Shādhān (second half of the twelfth century). Thus, the literature seems to indicate a process of "enrichment" of the narrative motif, perhaps by means of a transposition of elements between Sunnī and Shīʿī reports.

Another question relates to the ways in which these elements moved between Sunnī and Shīʿī sources. It is probable that oral tradition played a major role, given its preference for themes about miracles connected to the lives of the prophets, of Muḥammad and of Muslim heroes. Literary testimony would simply reflect this oral elaboration, which consisted of using competing versions of the story with various protagonists in order to develop the main motif. It would most probably also be a secondary reflection; the infrequent appearance of the story in literary sources is probably due to the negative attitude to this kind of material which was almost always rejected or completely ignored.<sup>55</sup> Finally, the existence of a story about ʿAlī's encounter with the skull better explains the silence of certain literary sources. This version could only deepen the doubts engendered by the existence of the variant versions in which Jesus is the protagonist. This material necessarily increased the doubts concerning Jesus' meeting with a skull during a certain moment of his life, leading the men of letters to the conclusion that this story was unworthy of being included in their works. If this description of the development is accurate, we should conclude that an increased oral circulation and success of the various differing and competing versions of the motif from the ninth century onwards proved to be an embarrassment to men of letters and led to a diminished circulation of relevant reports in literary sources.

#### *The late medieval and modern manuscript versions of the story*

The composition of the Persian poem of ʿAṭṭār marks a significant point in the development of the story, since it is a literary elaboration that includes almost all the main elements found in earlier versions. It also lends literary dignity to a story found before only in collections of religious traditions. Despite these considerations, only a few later works of Arabic literature mention the story. The first is a work attributed to Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Nuṭq al-mafhūm min al-ṣamt al-maʿlūm*, devoted to the same topic as the *Man ʿasha baʿd al-mawt* of Ibn Abī ʿl-Dunyā. Both deal with men or other creatures brought back to life after

<sup>55</sup>This is, for instance, the attitude of the Shīʿī Ibn Abī ʿl-Ḥadīd (d. 1258), who mentions *ḥadīth al-jumjuma* as one of the *ḥadīths* falsified by Shīʿīs: see his *Sharḥ nahj al-balāgha* (Qom, 1404 A.H.), vol. 11, p. 48. Another question is connected to the place or places where the various versions were elaborated. The discussion is very hypothetical: Ibn Bishr was originally from Khurāsān, and thus Persian, like most other authors quoted so far; al-Saqṣīnī wrote the first edition of his work in Persian and was from the region of the Bulghār. Al-Ṭurṭūshī was from al-Andalus, but also travelled to the east and even to Wāsiṭ; see M. Fierro's introduction to Abū Bakr al-Ṭurṭūshī, *Kitāb al-hawādīth wa-l-bidaʿ* (Madrid, 1993), p. 39.

death, thanks to God's omnipotence. It is noteworthy that while Ibn Abī ʿl-Dunyā in the ninth century felt that a version of the story could not or should not be included in his work, some centuries later the author of *al-Nuṭq al-mafhūm* adopted a different position and included no less than three versions of it in his work. The first is almost identical to the second one quoted by al-Ṭurṭūshī; the second one is similar to the first one in al-Ṭurṭūshī, but the name of the king here is Bahrām b. Ḥafṣ; the third and last version is taken from Abū Nuʿaym and is traced back to Ishāq b. Bishr.<sup>56</sup> Another author who quotes the story is al-Ibshīhī (d. after 1446) in his *al-Mustaṭraf fī kull fann mustaṭraf*. This version is also well-known, since it is the first mentioned by al-Ṭurṭūshī, though it contains a small number of variant readings and the king is named Balwān b. Ḥafṣ.<sup>57</sup> A passage in the Qurʾānic commentary of al-Thaʿālibī (d. 1471) might also include an allusion to the story in the section where it states that Jesus used to touch the corpse, or the grave, or the skull of the dead he wanted to call back to life with his staff (*kāna yaḍribu bi-ʿaṣāhu al-mayyit aw al-qabr aw al-jumjuma*). Finally, the version of the story traced back to Ibn Bishr can also be found in works by later authors, such as al-Zabīdī (d. 1791).<sup>58</sup>

Thus, the story appears only infrequently in published literary works. However, the situation is different in unpublished manuscripts. There I was able to identify more than thirty versions of the story and obtain a reproduction or personally examine most of them.<sup>59</sup> These versions are attested in individual

<sup>56</sup>See as an appendix to Ibn Abī ʿl-Dunyā, *Man ʿasha baʿd al-mawt*, pp. 123–128 nos. 58–60. The most interesting particular included in the third version is that the skull died at the age of 74 years.

<sup>57</sup>Al-Ibshīhī, *al-Mustaṭraf fī kull fann mustaṭraf* (Beirut, n.d.), p. 827.

<sup>58</sup>Al-Thaʿālibī, *al-Ġawāhir al-ḥisān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān* (Beirut, n.d.), I, p. 269; Al-Zabīdī, *Ithāf al-sāda al-muttaqīn* (Cairo, n.d.), vol. 10, pp. 264–269; al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-maʿānī* (Beirut, n.d.), vol. 3, p. 169.

<sup>59</sup>A reproduction and translation of eight of these manuscripts is given in B. Torta, "La leggenda islamica del testo redivivo nelle fonti arabe," (Diss., Università di Torino, 1993–94). Along with these manuscripts — six of which are preserved in Gotha and two in Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Città del Vaticano — I was able to access and use for the purpose of this research the numerous manuscripts mentioned in the bibliography; see below, p. 32–33. The versions in verse have not been taken into consideration in this study, and I was only able to collect references to a few other manuscripts that were not available to me. 1. MS Mosul, Maktabat al-Awqāf, *Qiṣṣat al-jumjuma wa-mā jarā la-hā maʿa sayyidina ʿIsā*, dated 1114 A.H. (cat. 1980, V, p. 291 no. 3); 2. MS Mosul, Maktabat al-Awqāf, *Qiṣṣat al-jumjuma maʿa ʿIsā*, dated 1256 A.H. (cat. 1980, VIII, 351 no. 8). Torta, "La leggenda," p. 4, quotes Mosul manuscripts according to the catalogue by D. al-Chelebi, *Makḥṭūṭāt al-Mawṣil* (Baghdad, 1927), p. 26 no. 52; the correct reference is p. 26 no. 56, where reference is made to the two manuscripts that are now in the Maktabat al-Awqāf. 3. MS Baghdad, Maktabat al-Awqāf no. 1121, *Qiṣṣat al-jumjuma wa-mā jarā la-hā maʿa sayyidina ʿIsā*, 3 ff.; 4. MS Tombouctou, Maktabat Mammā Ḥaydara no. 1311, *Qiṣṣat al-jumjuma*, 7 ff. (cat. *Catalogue of Manuscripts in Mamma Haidara Library*, prepared by A. Mamma Haidara, ed. A.F. Sayyid (London, 2000), II, pp. 691–692); 5. MS Damascus, Maktabat Al-Asad, no. 10174, *al-Jumjuma wa-sayyidunā ʿIsā* (I am indebted to Francesca Bellino for this reference). The MS Dresden, no. 264 (cat. H.O. Fleischer, *Catalogus codicum... dresdensis* [Lipsiae, 1831] p. 39, quoted by Torta, "La leggenda," p. 4) is a Turkish manuscript. The version contained in MS Gotha 2212, ff. 2b–8b, which is in verse, has been the subject of an article by Pennacchiotti, "Gesù e Balwān bin Ḥafṣ." MS Gotha 2756, quoted in the catalogue of W. Perth, *Die arabischen Handschriften der herzoglichen Bibliothek zu Gotha* (Gotha, 1877–

manuscripts of a few folios or in anonymous collections of traditions, usually written between the 16th and 19th centuries with no date of redaction or transcription nor the name of the author. Only in a few cases is there mention of names or titles; the rest are unknown or unidentifiable. They come from the entire Arab world and their analysis will constitute the focus of the next part of this study. Along with these, I also refer to the other versions – most probably dating from the same period – which have been already edited in the original Arabic or in translation. For example, I shall use the long version of the story quoted by M. Asín Palacios in his “Logia,” given in the original Arabic along with a Latin translation,<sup>60</sup> a version included in a booklet entitled *al-Munājāt al-kubrā*,<sup>61</sup> and the long version in Aljamiado quoted by A. Vespertino Rodríguez in his collection of traditions.<sup>62</sup> Regarding instead the versions published only in translation, including those of Asín Palacios, R. Basset and C.E. Padwick, reference is made to that translated by G. Levi Della Vida and taken from a similar but different work.<sup>63</sup> The story also appears – in a version which is rather long and similar to the later manuscripts – in the collection of prophetic legends translated by G. Weil.<sup>64</sup>

All these versions share some peculiarities. The most evident of these is the substantial stability of the plot throughout all the various versions and their reliance on the same elements. Therefore, the differences in the use of the various elements attested in the versions discussed previously have now given way to a story which has already acquired its final form both in its finality – given the overall centrality of the eschatological theme – and in the sequence of the narrative elements. Jesus, during one of his wanderings, came across a worn

1892), vol. 4, p. 464, as “Geschichte von Schädel”, includes what Torta, “La leggenda,” pp. 149f. and repr. of manuscript at pp. 229–245, rightly labels as an independent development of the literary motif with no relationship to the story discussed here.

<sup>60</sup>Translated by Hayek, *Le Christ de l'Islam*, pp. 199–203.

<sup>61</sup>This booklet, in the edition I had access to, was published in Cairo by Muṣṭafā al-Babī al-Ḥalabī in 1956. It consists of a version of the story in prose and a version in verse traced back to a certain ‘Abd Allāh al-Kaḥif (d. 1688). It is inserted after a story of the dialogue on Mt. Sinai between God and Moses and a brief tradition about Adam’s death; this version is the one which Basset translated and included in his collection of stories and legends, stating he had taken it from a work entitled *Munājāt Mūsā* (see *Mille et un contes*, III, p. 177). It is also identical to that translated by Padwick, “The Nebi ‘Isa and the Skull,” pp. 56–62, who took it from an unspecified work he found in Damascus (which was most probably the same as that used by Basset). The poetical version found in the booklet I used is substantially similar to the one edited, translated and studied by Pennacchietti, “Gesù e Balwān bin Ḥafṣ.”

<sup>62</sup>Vespertino Rodríguez, *Leyendas aljamiadas*, pp. 342–348.

<sup>63</sup>Levi Della Vida, “Gesù e il teschio,” p. 164, states that his translated report was taken from a book entitled *Munājāt Kalīm Allāh sayyidinā Mūsā b. ‘Imrān*, but despite his claim (p. 164 n. 4), the version translated by Basset is not the same. Thus, it must be argued that in the 1920s at least two different works devoted to the *Munājāt Mūsā* were in circulation in the Arab world. A volume that fits this description is mentioned in the *Fihris al-kutub al-mawjūda bi-l-maktaba al-Azhariyya* (Cairo, 1946–62), vol. 5, p. 519: *Qışṣat al-jumjuma ma’a nabī Allāh ‘Isā ‘alayhi al-salām*..., pp. 29–34.

<sup>64</sup>Weil, *Biblical Legends of the Mussulmans*, pp. 221–226. A version translated from an unspecified source can also be found in J. Knappert, *Islamic Legends*, vol. 1, pp. 174–76. The version of Boutros Ghali, *Les perles éperpillées*, pp. 17–35, looks like an elaboration of MS Paris, Bibl. Nat. 1636.

skull and was surprised. With God’s permission, the skull was called back to life and told Jesus that when it was alive it was a powerful king, benevolent but idolatrous. A full description is given of the prerogatives and powers of the king, including long lists of his slaves, of the towns he built, of his sons, wives, and so forth. One day, while in the bath, he suddenly fell ill and a few days later the Angel of Death came to take his soul. After the funeral and burial, his soul returned to his body and angels visited him in the grave. First came two angels who had been entrusted to make him write about his deeds, and after them came Munkar and Nakīr to interrogate him about his faith. Condemned by God to Hell, the skull, prompted by Jesus, described it. Lists of damned people, divided according to their sins, were mentioned along with a description of Hell, of the thousands of angels entrusted with meting out the various punishments, and the names of Hell’s seven layers. Finally, a shout from the sky gave the skull permission to come out of Hell, thus rewarding his good behavior on earth. Then the skull asked Jesus to call him back to life so that he could become a true believer. God gave his consent and the skull regained life as a young man and lived until the end of his days.

This plot is common to all versions. Nevertheless, an interesting feature may be noted: there is a general variability and a substantial autonomy of the different versions in the literary elaboration of the same elements and of the fixed plot. These versions never, or rarely, bear the signs of textual interdependency; rather all are original and autonomous versions of the story. Synoptic tables dealing with the entire story and the various developments in the literary elaboration of the various elements would be the best way to demonstrate this phenomenon. A few examples will suffice for our purpose.

Though the introductory sections, such as the title and name of the transmitter, cannot be considered as integral elements of the story, they already bear signs of this autonomy. For instance, the titles range from the most simple *Ḥadīth al-jumjuma*,<sup>65</sup> *Ḥadīth al-jumjuma ma’a ‘Isā*,<sup>66</sup> *Qışṣat al-jumjuma*,<sup>67</sup> and *Khabar al-jumjuma*,<sup>68</sup> to much longer versions, such as *Qışṣat al-jumjuma wa-mā jarā la-hā ma’a sayyidinā ‘Isā*.<sup>69</sup> This last title appears also in slightly

<sup>65</sup>Asín Palacios, “Logia,” p. 426; MS Princeton N.S. Mansell 2160, f. 61b; MS Algiers, Bibl. Nat., no. 574, f. 137a; the Aljamiado text also makes use of the term *ḥadīth* (A. Vespertino Rodríguez, *Leyendas aljamiadas*, p. 342); see al-Saqṣīnī, *Zahrāt al-riyād*, p. 35. This title is also mentioned in some cases at the end of the story, for example in MS Berlin, Staatsbibliothek We. 1785, f. 51a; MS Paris, Bibl. Nat. 3655, f. 116a; MS Gotha 2760, f. 15a. The fact that not all of the titles are of the same significance should not be underestimated, since some of the versions are individual works, while others appear in manuscripts as chapters of longer collections. In some cases they do not have a title at all.

<sup>66</sup>MS Bibl. Vaticana ar. 1191, f. 37b; MS Bibl. Vaticana Borg. ar. 161, f. 59b; MS Leiden or. 14027, f. 130b; MS Paris, Bibl. Nat. 5616, f. 67a; see also MS Milano, Ambrosiana 614, 199a: *Ḥadīth al-jumjuma allatī kallamat ‘Isā*; MS Milano, Ambrosiana 1161, f. 104a: *Ḥadīth al-jumjuma wa-nuṭṭuhā li-‘Isā*.

<sup>67</sup>MS Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Pet. I 110, f. 47a; MS Gotha 2737, f. 1a; at the end of the story, for example *tammāt qışṣat al-jumjuma*: MS Paris, Bibl. Nat. 2761, f. 78b; MS Algiers, Bibl. Nat. 728, 41b.

<sup>68</sup>MS Paris, Bibl. Nat. 1363, f. 159a, but quoted at the end.

<sup>69</sup>MS Strasbourg, Bibl. Nat. et Un. no. 137, f. 126b; MS København, Kongelige Bibl. no. 234, f. 31b; MS Gotha 2736, f. 1a; see MS Bibl. Vaticana ar. 1747, f. 145a, without the word *sayyidinā*; see also MS London, British Lib. Or. 4376, f. 12a: *Kitāb qışṣat*...

differing versions: *Qisṣat al-jumjuma wa-mā waqa'a la-hā ma'a sayyidinā 'Īsā*,<sup>70</sup> or *Qisṣat al-jumjuma wa-mā jarā baynahā wa-bayna al-nabī 'Īsā b. Maryam*.<sup>71</sup> The term "tale" (*qisṣa*) is thus the preferred one in the longer versions of the title and is also mentioned in some other variant readings: *Qisṣat al-jumjuma ma'a nabi Allāh 'Īsā*, *Qisṣat al-jumjuma wa-mā akhbarahā sayyidunā [sic.] 'Īsā*, *al-Hikāya al-'azīma... bi-qisṣat al-jumjuma*.<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, one manuscript even uses the term *ḥadīth* together with *qisṣa*: *Ḥadīth al-jumjuma wa-mā kāna min qisṣatihā ma'a 'Īsā*.<sup>73</sup> No less variation can be found in the names, which usually introduce stories of this kind and are quoted at the beginning of the text. Some sources do not mention any name;<sup>74</sup> when a name is mentioned, that of Ka'b al-Aḥbār is preferred,<sup>75</sup> while Wahb b. Munabbih's is the second most common.<sup>76</sup> Sometimes Ibn 'Abbās is mentioned, though his name is never used in the early versions of the story.<sup>77</sup> One manuscript contains an *isnād* tracing the story to "Ibn 'Abbās from Ka'b al-Aḥbār."<sup>78</sup>

The originality and mutual autonomy in the literary elaboration of the various versions of the story become clearer when the elements of its plot are examined. The introductory element, that of the wandering Jesus, is elaborated in the following examples: he was passing by a *wādī* called Wādī 'l-Qiyāma (*wādī* of the Resurrection),<sup>79</sup> by an unspecified *wādī* of Syria;<sup>80</sup> by a *wādī* in Syria full

<sup>70</sup>MS Paris, Bibl. Nat. 3652, f. 90b.

<sup>71</sup>MS Manchester, John Rylands Library no. 648, f. 22a.

<sup>72</sup>*Al-Munājāt al-kubrā*, p. 60; MS Damascus, Maktabat al-Asad no. 12685, f. 45b; MS Gotha 2757, f. 104a.

<sup>73</sup>MS Paris, Bibl. Nat. 2738, f. 99a. The question of the terms used in the titles is intriguing. In this particular case, it should be noted that terms such as *qisṣa*, *ḥadīth* and even *ḥikāya* are used interchangeably. Concerning the wide range of terms used to introduce stories, see the discussion by J. Sadan, "Death of a princess: Episodes of the Barmakid legend in its late evolution," in *Story-telling in the Framework of non-Fictional Arabic Literature*, ed. S. Leder (Wiesbaden, 1998) pp. 130–1, n. 1, and the bibliography.

<sup>74</sup>See, for example, MS Bibl. Vaticana ar. 1191; and cf. MS Paris, Bibl. Nat. 3652, f. 90b, which are introduced by the general statement *ḥukīya*, followed by the common assertion that God knows better; see also MS London, British Lib. Or. 4376, f. 12b, which mentions an unspecified *ṣāḥib al-ḥadīth* in the middle of the story.

<sup>75</sup>MS Bibl. Vaticana ar. 1191, ff. 49b, 50a, 51a; MS Berlin, Staatsbibliothek We. 1785, f. 49b; MS Gotha 95, f. 1b; MS Gotha 2736, f. 1b; MS Strasbourg, Bibl. Nat. et Un. no. 137, f. 126b; MS Paris, Bibl. Nat. 2738, f. 99a; MS Princeton N.S. Mansell 2160, f. 61b; MS Damascus, Maktabat al-Asad no. 12685, f. 45b; Levi Della Vida, "Gesù e il teschio," p. 165; MS Milano, Ambrosiana 614, f. 199a; MS Manchester, John Rylands Library no. 648, f. 22b.

<sup>76</sup>MS Leiden or. 14027, f. 130b: but Ka'b is then quoted at the end of f. 131a. In one case both of the names of Ka'b and Wahb are mentioned in close succession; see MS Paris, Bibl. Nat. 2761, f. 64b; and cf. at the end of MS Leiden Or. 14027, f. 131a.

<sup>77</sup>MS Bibl. Vaticana ar. 1747, f. 145a; MS Algiers, Bibl. Nat. 728, 41b; MS Paris, Bibl. Nat. 5616, ff. 67a, 68a and 68b.

<sup>78</sup>MS Milano, Ambrosiana, 1161, f. 104a. Cf. MS Algiers, Bibl. Nat. 538, 4b: Ka'b 'an Ibn 'Abbās.

<sup>79</sup>Asín Palacios, "Logia," p. 426; MS Leiden or. 14027, f. 130b; MS Algiers, Bibl. Nat., no. 574, f. 137b; Cf. the early version ascribed to Ibn Bishr which in Abū Nu'aym, *Ḥilya*, vol. 6, p. 10, gives Wādī 'l-Ṣakhra, while in al-Zabīdī, *Ithāf*, vol. 10, p. 264, it becomes Wādī 'l-Qiyāma.

<sup>80</sup>MS Berlin, Staatsbibliothek We. 1785, f. 49b; MS Gotha 2736, f. 1b; MS Paris, Bibl. Nat. 1363, f. 153b; MS Paris, Bibl. Nat. 2761, f. 64b; MS Princeton N.S. Mansell 2160, f. 61b; MS Milano, Ambrosiana 614, f. 199a; cf. also MS London, British Lib. Or. 4376, f. 12a, which does not mention Syria, but says that Jesus used to wander from place to place.

of trees and rivers;<sup>81</sup> a *wādī* full of trees, rivers, birds and fruits;<sup>82</sup> or, according to another version, combining various details, by a *wādī* in Syria full of trees and birds;<sup>83</sup> Jesus used to walk through a *wādī* in Syria called 'Arwā, which was one of the richest *wādīs* in grass and plants;<sup>84</sup> during his wanderings he passed by a graveyard (*jabāna*);<sup>85</sup> according to some sources he was accompanied by the apostles.<sup>86</sup> A variant narrative is found in those versions which describe Jesus passing by a town on the seashore, with dried-up trees and flowers with no colors;<sup>87</sup> he passed by the Dead Sea and there he found the skull;<sup>88</sup> or he met it when he left the town in which the inhabitants had been turned into monkeys and pigs.<sup>89</sup> The reference to the water is more explicit where it is stated that the skull was by a huge river;<sup>90</sup> a river where Jesus could perform ablutions;<sup>91</sup> by a river where Jesus found a skull of intense whiteness.<sup>92</sup> This last description of the skull introduces another element: qualities and peculiarities of the skull that attracted Jesus' attention. Jesus saw a skull of startling whiteness;<sup>93</sup> an astonishing skull that surprised him because of its dimensions, two cubits by one,<sup>94</sup> or four spans high and wide;<sup>95</sup> a skull which was not only white, but also old and time-worn;<sup>96</sup> a skull that frightened whoever encountered it, since it was big or big and old,<sup>97</sup> a gigantic and time worn skull,<sup>98</sup> a very white skull,<sup>99</sup> a white and big skull,<sup>100</sup> a skull that time had eroded and upon which the years

<sup>81</sup>MS Paris, Bibl. Nat. 3652, 90b; MS Damascus, Maktabat al-Asad no. 12685, f. 45b.

<sup>82</sup>Trees, rivers and birds: MS Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Pet. I 110, f. 47a; *al-Munājāt al-kubrā*, p. 60; also with fruit: MS Paris, Bibl. Nat. 3655, f. 110a; also with springs, grapes and the scent of fruit: MS Manchester, John Rylands Library no. 648, f. 22b.

<sup>83</sup>MS Strasbourg, Bibl. Nat. et Un. no. 137, f. 126b.

<sup>84</sup>MS København, Kongelige Bibl. no. 234, f. 32a; MS Milano, Ambrosiana 1161, f. 104a; see also MS Vaticana ar. 1747, f. 145a; and cf. MS Paris, Bibl. Nat. 5616, f. 67a, but without the name; MS Algiers, Bibl. Nat. 538, 4b.

<sup>85</sup>MS Gotha 95, f. 1b.

<sup>86</sup>MS Gotha 1740, f. 199a; MS London, British Lib. Or. 4376, f. 12b: mentions the term *wuzarā'*.

<sup>87</sup>See MS Paris, Bibl. Nat. 2738, f. 99a.

<sup>88</sup>Weil, *Biblical Legends of the Mussulmans*, p. 221; Knappert, *Islamic Legends*, p. 174.

<sup>89</sup>MS Leiden or. 14027, f. 130b.

<sup>90</sup>MS Berlin, Staatsbibliothek We. 1785, f. 49b; *al-Munājāt al-kubrā*, p. 60; MS Milano, Ambrosiana 1161, f. 104a; cf. also MS Damascus, Maktabat al-Asad no. 12685, f. 45b; MS London, British Lib. Or. 4376, f. 12b: and a river in a huge *wādī*.

<sup>91</sup>MS Paris, Bibl. Nat. 1363, f. 153b; MS Algiers, Bibl. Nat. 738, 41b.

<sup>92</sup>MS København, Kongelige Bibl. no. 234, f. 32a; *al-Munājāt al-kubrā*, p. 60; cf. MS Paris, Bibl. Nat. 5616, f. 67a.

<sup>93</sup>See also MS Paris, Bibl. Nat. 2761, f. 64b; among the early sources, see, for instance, Abū Nu'aym, *Ḥilya*, vol. 4, p. 448: Jesus was surprised by the white color of the skull and licked it.

<sup>94</sup>MS Gotha 95, f. 1b; Levi Della Vida, "Gesù e il teschio," p. 165; see already in al-Ṭurṭūshī, *Sirāj*, p. 73: a gigantic and frightening skull.

<sup>95</sup>MS Manchester, John Rylands Library no. 648, f. 22b.

<sup>96</sup>See MS Bibl. Vaticana ar. 1191, f. 37b; MS Gotha 2736, f. 1b; but already in Abū Nu'aym, *Ḥilya*, p. 10; and al-Ṭurṭūshī, *Sirāj*, p. 67.

<sup>97</sup>MS Berlin, Staatsbibliothek We. 1785, f. 49b; MS Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Pet. I 110, f. 47a; MS Paris, Bibl. Nat. 5616, f. 67a; MS London, British Lib. Or. 4376, f. 12b.

<sup>98</sup>MS Paris, Bibl. Nat. 3655, f. 110a.

<sup>99</sup>MS Paris, Bibl. Nat. 1363, f. 153b.

<sup>100</sup>White: MS Princeton N.S. Mansell 2160, f. 61b; white and big: MS Leiden or. 14027,



and days had left their mark;<sup>101</sup> a worn-out skull of surprising whiteness,<sup>102</sup> a white skull found by the river and of surprisingly huge dimensions,<sup>103</sup> a white skull that was clearly ancient,<sup>104</sup> a very white and worn-out skull upon which there was some writing. All these details prompted Jesus' hour-long state of surprise.<sup>105</sup>

The literary elaboration of the most detailed and complex elements of the plot confirms this variability and autonomy of the various versions. For instance, the late medieval and modern versions do not usually name the king to whom the skull belonged when alive,<sup>106</sup> but show a preference for long and schematic descriptions of his powers and possessions; these include long lists of his women, the towns founded by him, his children, his slaves and the various soldiers of his army. One of the versions, for example, states that the skull said to Jesus:

O prophet of God, I was one of the greatest kings of Syria. When I rode, there used to ride with me seven thousand slaves wearing clothes (*aqbiya*) of white silk (*dībāj*), with golden belts and crowns full of gems, riding gray horses; seven thousand slaves wearing clothes of black silk with belts and crowns full of gems, riding black horses; seven thousand slaves wearing (clothes of) red (silk) with belts and crowns full of gems; riding red horses; seven thousand slaves wearing green silk with golden belts and crowns full of pearls and gems and mounting green horses; seven thousand slaves wearing clothes of blue silk with golden belts and crowns full of gems riding piebald horses, and seven hundred slaves wearing Byzantine clothes with Persian belts etc.<sup>107</sup>

The ranks of soldiers riding together with the king are described in various ways, including descriptions of the harnesses of various colors and materials, such as silk, brocade etc., with the aim of emphasizing the king's endless riches, and, along with this, his profound unbelief: despite possessing these riches, he remained an idolater.<sup>108</sup> In the passage translated above, the figure of "seven thousand" is the one used in the list, but the sources differ widely on this point as well.<sup>109</sup> Lists of one thousand, a device used in the early sources, are also

f. 130b; MS Vaticana ar. 1747, f. 145a; MS Milano, Ambrosiana 1161, f. 104a; MS Algiers, Bibl. Nat. 538, 4b.

<sup>101</sup>MS Paris, Bibl. Nat. 3652, f. 90b.

<sup>102</sup>Asín Palacios, "Logia," p. 426.

<sup>103</sup>MS Damascus, Maktabat al-Asad, no. 12685, f. 45b.

<sup>104</sup>MS Strasbourg, Bibl. Nat. et Un. no. 137, f. 126b.

<sup>105</sup>MS København, Kongelige Bibl. no. 234, f. 32a; MS Algiers, Bibl. Nat. 738, 42a; MS Paris, Bibl. Nat. 5616, f. 67a.

<sup>106</sup>Excluding MS Manchester, John Rylands Library no. 648, f. 28b, where it is said at the end that he was Dārim b. Rūmān, the Byzantine (*al-rūmī*).

<sup>107</sup>MS Paris, Bibl. Nat. 3652, ff. 91a-91b.

<sup>108</sup>Regarding the Muslim prohibition to wear silk, see R. Tottoli, "Tradizioni islamiche sull'uso di tessuti e vestiti," in *Tejer y vestir de la Antigüedad al Islam*, ed. M. Marín, Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas (Madrid, 2001), pp. 43-72.

<sup>109</sup>See MS Berlin, Staatsbibliothek We. 1785, f. 49b; MS Paris, Bibl. Nat. 3655, ff. 110b-111b.

included in many of these later versions: it is stated that the king had one thousand children, one thousand virgins, defeated one thousand armies and conquered one thousand towns;<sup>110</sup> further, he had one thousand white slaves, one thousand Abyssinian slaves, one thousand Nubian slaves and so forth.<sup>111</sup> Elsewhere it is stated that he had four thousand soldiers or slaves wearing red silk with golden belts, four thousand slaves wearing yellow silk, four thousand slaves wearing other luxurious clothes, etc.<sup>112</sup> Other numbers appear as well: the king had at his service ten thousand servants,<sup>113</sup> forty viziers commanding forty thousand soldiers each, forty thousand chiefs,<sup>114</sup> two groups of twenty thousand servants,<sup>115</sup> and a total number of twenty thousand slaves luxuriously dressed; their clothes and descriptions are given by groups of four thousand.<sup>116</sup> Some sources give the total number of soldiers in his army as one million,<sup>117</sup> or seven hundred thousand.<sup>118</sup>

There is also great variation in the description of the king's death, the mourning of family and friends, the description of the Angel of Death, the two angels recording the deeds he had performed during his life, of Munkar and Nakīr, the condemnation to Hell, the torments and punishments, and the structure of Hell. Not even the period in which the skull lived is the same in the sources: following a question by Jesus, the skull states that he lived at the time of Daniel,<sup>119</sup> or of Elijah,<sup>120</sup> or at the time of Moses,<sup>121</sup> or that he was of the people of Moses living at the time of Elijah.<sup>122</sup> Also those elements showing a limited range of

<sup>110</sup>MS Paris, Bibl. Nat. 3652, f. 91a; MS Paris, Bibl. Nat. 3655, f. 111b; MS Strasbourg, Bibl. Nat. et Un. no. 137, f. 128a; *al-Munājāt al-kubrā*, p. 61; MS Milano, Ambrosiana 1161, f. 114b.

<sup>111</sup>MS Manchester, John Rylands Library no. 648, 23b.

<sup>112</sup>Cf. MS Bibl. Vaticana ar. 1191, ff. 38b-39a; MS Gotha 95, f. 2a; MS Paris, Bibl. Nat. 5616, f. 67a; MS Gotha 2757, ff. 105a-105b; MS Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Pet. I 110, ff. 47a-47b; MS Milano, Ambrosiana 1161, f. 104b; MS Milano, Ambrosiana 614, f. 199a; MS Strasbourg, Bibl. Nat. et Un. no. 137, ff. 127b-128a; MS Princeton N.S. Mansell 2160, ff. 63a-63b, 64a; *al-Munājāt al-kubrā*, p. 61. In the description of his generous behavior towards poor people, a schematic list of one thousand is also used in some versions: he used to spend one thousand *dīnārs* on them, to give clothes to one thousand of them, to feed one thousand, etc.; MS Bibl. Vaticana ar. 1191, f. 39a; MS Paris, Bibl. Nat. 2761, ff. 65b-66b.

<sup>113</sup>MS Algiers, Bibl. Nat. 538, 5b-6a; MS Algiers, Bibl. Nat. 728, 42b; MS København, Kongelige Bibl. no. 234, ff. 32a-32b, adds that the king had one thousand concubines, and married one hundred daughters of other kings.

<sup>114</sup>MS Manchester, John Rylands Library no. 648, f. 23b.

<sup>115</sup>MS Vaticana ar. 1747, f. 145a.

<sup>116</sup>MS Damascus, Maktabat al-Asad no. 12685, f. 46a.

<sup>117</sup>MS Paris, Bibl. Nat. 3655, ff. 110b-111b; MS Gotha 2757, f. 105b; MS Strasbourg, Bibl. Nat. et Un. no. 137, ff. 127b-128a; MS Milano, Ambrosiana 1161, f. 104b; MS Paris, Bibl. Nat. 5616, f. 67a. One thousand soldiers: *al-Munājāt al-kubrā*, p. 61; an army of a hundred million soldiers: MS København, Kongelige Bibl. no. 234, f. 32b.

<sup>118</sup>MS London, British Lib. Or. 4376, f. 12b.

<sup>119</sup>MS Gotha 95, f. 5b.

<sup>120</sup>MS Gotha 2760, f. 14b; MS Princeton N.S. Mansell 2160, f. 80a; MS Paris, Bibl. Nat. 2761, f. 76b; MS Manchester, John Rylands Library no. 648, f. 28a; MS Milano, Ambrosiana 614, f. 201a; MS Leiden or. 14027, f. 131a; cf. Weil, *Biblical Legends of the Mussulmans*, p. 225: "I am a descendant of the Prophet Elias."

<sup>121</sup>MS Berlin, Staatsbibliothek We. 1785, f. 51a; MS Paris, Bibl. Nat. 3655, f. 115a.

<sup>122</sup>MS Gotha 2757, f. 107b; MS Paris, Bibl. Nat. 3652, f. 93b.

possibilities are usually combined in various and autonomous ways, such as in the case of the names of the seven layers of Hell and of the people destined to each layer. The names of these layers, based upon terms used in the Qur'ān, are almost always *jahannam* (Qur'ān 2:206) *laẓā* (70:15), *al-ḥuṭama* (104:4-5), *hāwiya* (101:9), *saqar* (54:48, 74:26), *al-sa'ir* (22:4), *jaḥīm* (2:119).<sup>123</sup> The categories of the damned and their names are more or less constant, though in a few cases different groups are mentioned: sinners of the people of Muḥammad, Jews, Christians, Mazdeans, Shī'īs, demons and unbelievers, idolaters and sinners in general.<sup>124</sup> The originality of each version is displayed in the attribution of a name and a category to each layer. If the fourth layer is taken as an example, it can be noted that the various versions of the story mention five of the seven names referred to above: *laẓā*,<sup>125</sup> *al-sa'ir*,<sup>126</sup> *saqar*,<sup>127</sup> *al-ḥuṭama*,<sup>128</sup> *jaḥīm*.<sup>129</sup> and identify the categories assigned to it: Shī'īs,<sup>130</sup> those who do not believe in the Day of Judgement,<sup>131</sup> Mazdeans,<sup>132</sup> unbelievers,<sup>133</sup> evildoers,<sup>134</sup> Iblis and his followers,<sup>135</sup> or the 'ulamā' who do not apply the precepts of religious law.<sup>136</sup>

The autonomy of the various versions is also reflected in the fact that some of them introduce details into the story that indicate a specific concern or a polemical purpose. The sequence of the layers of Hell is a typical example of this kind: a clear sectarian polemical attitude is displayed when mention is made of a specific layer for the Shī'īs.<sup>137</sup> Similarly, the much debated theological question of the sinful believer's status has left its mark in some versions of the story. Muslims who committed grave sins — and who are defined in some of these sources

<sup>123</sup>The only exception is the name *al-zamharīr* for the seventh layer: MS København, Kongelige Bibl. no. 234, f. 34a. *Al-Zamharīr* is a strange name for a layer of Hell, since it means "bitter cold."

<sup>124</sup>See the original statement in *al-Munājāt al-kubrā*, p. 65: the Pharaohs are in the sixth layer; cf. MS Milano, Ambrosiana f. 201a: Pharaohs and unbelievers.

<sup>125</sup>MS Gotha 95, f. 4a; MS Gotha 2760, f. 13b; MS London, British Lib., Or. 4376, f. 14b; MS Milano, Ambrosiana 1161, f. 106a.

<sup>126</sup>MS Gotha 2736, ff. 6a-6b; MS Paris, Bibl. Nat. 1363, f. 157b; *al-Munājāt al-kubrā*, p. 65.

<sup>127</sup>MS Paris, Bibl. Nat. 2761, f. 74a; MS Princeton N.S. Mansell 2160, f. 74a; MS Manchester, John Rylands Library no. 648, f. 27a.

<sup>128</sup>MS Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Pet. I 110, f. 48b; MS Damascus, Maktabat al-Asad no. 12685, f. 47a; MS Strasbourg, Bibl. Nat. et Un. no. 137, f. 133a; MS Paris, Bibl. Nat. 5616, f. 68a; MS Milano, Ambrosiana 614, f. 201a.

<sup>129</sup>MS København, Kongelige Bibl. no. 234, f. 34a; MS Algiers, Bibl. Nat. 538, 9b.

<sup>130</sup>MS Gotha 95, f. 4a; MS Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Pet. I 110, f. 48b; MS Damascus, Maktabat al-Asad no. 12685, f. 47a; MS Strasbourg, Bibl. Nat. et Un. no. 137, f. 133a; *majūs* and Shī'īs together.

<sup>131</sup>MS Bibl. Vaticana ar. 1362, f. 208b.

<sup>132</sup>MS Gotha 2760, f. 13b; MS Algiers, Bibl. Nat. 538, 9b; MS London, British Lib., Or. 4376, f. 14b; Weil, *Biblical Legends of the Mussulmans*, p. 224.

<sup>133</sup>MS Gotha 2736, f. 6b.

<sup>134</sup>MS Princeton N.S. Mansell 2160, f. 74a; MS Paris, Bibl. Nat. 5616, f. 68a; MS Paris, Bibl. Nat. 2761, f. 74a; MS Algiers, Bibl. Nat. 728, 45b.

<sup>135</sup>*Al-Munājāt al-kubrā*, p. 65.

<sup>136</sup>MS Gotha 2757, f. 107a; MS Paris, Bibl. Nat. 3655, f. 114a.

<sup>137</sup>See the references given above and MS Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Pet. I 110, f. 48b; MS Gotha 95, f. 4a.

as sinners in general — are usually destined to the first layer of Hell.<sup>138</sup> Some versions show awareness of the idea that the punishment of sinful Muslims will be limited in time, and state that they stay in a layer where the punishment is less severe and that they will leave Hell thanks to Muḥammad's intercession.<sup>139</sup> A clearly polemical purpose is evident in the versions that reserve a layer in Hell for the 'ulamā' who do not respect religious law or do not practise what they preach.<sup>140</sup> The same group is indicated when the story mentions damned people wearing big turbans, or judges who mismanage the property of orphans.<sup>141</sup> In another case a particular category of people is the subject of a polemical attack when, after a description of the punishment assigned to one group of women, it is said that these are wet nurses.<sup>142</sup>

Though the originality and autonomy of most of the versions are clear, a degree of similarity between some of the manuscripts is recognizable. Cases of identical wording of whole manuscripts or of substantial parts thereof are few. Manuscripts usually show these similarities through pairs of versions, which reflect an identical elaboration of some elements, but then diverge in dealing with others. Generally speaking, it can be stated that out of all the versions of the story, only two pairs, MS Gotha 95 and MS Gotha 2737,<sup>143</sup> MS Bibl. Vaticana Borg. ar. 161 and the fifth text published by Asín Palacios, "Logia," are identical — and undoubtedly stem from the same literary text; they include only marginal variations that arise from copyists' errors.<sup>144</sup> Among all the

<sup>138</sup>MS Paris, Bibl. Nat. 3652, f. 93a; MS Berlin, Staatsbibliothek We. 1785, f. 50b; MS Manchester, John Rylands Library no. 648, f. 27a; MS Strasbourg, Bibl. Nat. et Un. no. 137, f. 132b; MS Damascus, Maktabat al-Asad no. 12685, f. 47a; MS Paris, Bibl. Nat. 2761, f. 74a; MS Milano, Ambrosiana 1161, f. 106a; MS Milano, Ambrosiana 614, f. 201a; *al-Munājāt al-kubrā*, p. 65; MS Gotha 2757, f. 106b; MS Gotha 95, f. 3b; MS Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Pet. I 110, f. 48b; with a Qur'ānic quotation. Without name: MS Gotha 2736, f. 6a. With the name only: MS Paris, Bibl. Nat. 1363, f. 157b. Cf. also MS Paris, Bibl. Nat. 3655, f. 114a: the first door is for those who committed grave sins.

<sup>139</sup>MS Gotha 2760, f. 13b; Weil, *Biblical Legends of the Mussulmans*, p. 224. But cf. instead MS Strasbourg, Bibl. Nat. et Un. no. 137, f. 135a: here the punishment of those who only thought about forbidden acts is described.

<sup>140</sup>See, respectively, MS Gotha 2757, f. 107a, and MS Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, Sprenger 2005, f. 22a.

<sup>141</sup>Cf. MS Strasbourg, Bibl. Nat. et Un. no. 137, f. 135b.

<sup>142</sup>MS Damascus, Maktabat al-Asad no. 12685, 47a. Regarding Muslim views on this, see A. Giladi, *Infants, Parents and Wet Nurses* (Leiden, 1999), especially pp. 13-40.

<sup>143</sup>See also Levi Della Vida, "Gesù e il teschio," according to Torta, "La leggenda," p. 3; given the substantial similarity of the two manuscripts, I have quoted only Gotha 95 in the preceding discussion, making reference to MS Gotha 2737 only where necessary.

<sup>144</sup>The text in MS Bibl. Vaticana Borg. ar. 161 is more accurate grammatically, though the version in Asín Palacios, "Logia," includes more details in the first part. The only substantial difference between the two versions is that MS Bibl. Vaticana Borg. ar. 161, f. 61a mentions men hanging by their tongues at the fourth door, while Asín Palacios, "Logia," p. 427, states that these are women. The text in MS Bibl. Vaticana Borg. ar. 161, f. 61a, makes it possible to complete the lacuna in Asín Palacios, "Logia," p. 427 ult.: *wa-raddahā basharan sawiyyan*. Both texts, the one in Asín Palacios and the manuscript in Vaticana Borg. ar. 161, are from al-Andalus while the one in Vaticana is older; it is from the second half of the seventeenth century, according to G. Levi Della Vida, "Manoscritti arabi di origine spagnola nella Biblioteca Vaticana", in *Collectanea Vaticana in honorem Anselmi M. Card. Albareda* (Città del Vaticano, 1962), p. 162. In the preceding discussion, I quoted from the text in Asín Palacios, "Logia," making reference to MS Bibl. Vaticana Borg. ar. 161 only where necessary.

ma →  
cf.  
Am  
nella  
purs come  
con tale  
nome  
p. 167  
ed. it.

manuscripts in which similar passages are included, it must be noted that almost identical parts in the two manuscripts from Gotha can also be found in MS Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Pet. I 110; this version also bears some similarity to MS Damascus, Maktabat al-Asad no. 12685. MS Gotha 2757 is close to the early version ascribed to Ibn Bishr, to which it adds mention of the layers of Hell. MS Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Spr. 2005 relies on the version of the *Zahra* of al-Saqsini, but has a different description of the damned people.<sup>145</sup> This version is similar to MS Leiden Or. 14027. MS Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale 2761 follows the first part of MS Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale 1363, but then takes a different approach in the final part; MS Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale 3652 is similar to MS Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale 3655, though this last version is longer and more elaborate, to the extent that the first appears to be an abridged version of the second. The evident relation between manuscripts preserved in the same libraries in Europe indicates that they originally belonged to the same group and were acquired from the same region. The similarity can thus be caused by geographical proximity. The question is very important, but unfortunately most manuscripts used in this study do not give a precise indication of date or place; in the absence of this information it is not possible to investigate this matter further.

Moreover, the version included in MS Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale 5616 faithfully follows the first part of MS København, Kongelige Bibl. no. 234, but is completely different at the end; MS Vaticana ar. 1747 has an introductory section similar to that in the two versions just quoted, but later on, after omitting a description of the layers of Hell, returns to a distinct elaboration of the final part of the story. This is also the case in MS Milano, Ambrosiana 1161: some elements are close to the corresponding elaborations in MS København, Kongelige Bibl. Nr. 234, but the differences in the elaborations of others are substantial. The version translated in Weil, *Biblical Legends of the Mussulmans*, is similar to that in Knappert, *Islamic Legends*. A certain similarity is also evident between the fifth version given by Asín Palacios, "Logia" and the Aljamiado one in Vespertino Rodríguez, *Leyendas aljamiadas y moriscas*. All the other versions do not seem to be related in any way.<sup>146</sup> Finally, it should also be considered that in the literary autonomy of each version a significant factor is represented by the stylistic elaboration.<sup>147</sup> Among all the versions studied, the most conspicuous from this point of view are MS Gotha 2736 and MS Manchester, John Rylands Library no. 648. These are not only autonomous

<sup>145</sup>This version states that this story is taken from a work entitled *Shams al-akhbār fī falak al-akhbār*.

<sup>146</sup>They are MS Bibl. Vaticana ar. 1191; MS Bibl. Vaticana ar. 1362; MS Strasbourg, Bibl. Nat. et Un. no. 137; MS London, British Lib. Or. 4376; MS Milano, Ambrosiana 614; MS Gotha 1740; MS Berlin, Staatsbibliothek We. 1785; MS Princeton N.S. Mansell 2160; *al-Munājāt al-kubrā*.

<sup>147</sup>I am aware that the stylistic aspect deserves a more detailed treatment. In the late versions of prophetic stories, there are many examples of prose, rhymed prose and poetry alternate. See, for example, the two stories of Joseph published by Ebied – Young and Croisier, mentioned in n. 3, which are poetic elaborations of the story. Needless to say, almost all the pertinent material is still unpublished.

and original versions, but show a significant stylistic reworking.<sup>148</sup>

Having described the contents of the versions and their relation to each other it is necessary to account for the crystallization of the story and its constituting elements on the one hand, and for the existence of the autonomous versions on the other. The crystallization of the story, being the final result of its development in the Muslim world, may have been caused by various reasons. First, when the early versions of the story appeared, Muslim eschatological tradition had not yet been fully developed. The great *ḥadīth* collections of the ninth century mention some elements, but do so very briefly. It is difficult to ascertain when the eschatological material related to Jesus' encounter with the skull came into being. The intricate relationship between the oral circulation of this material and its inclusion in literary works further complicates the situation.<sup>149</sup> Al-Qurṭubī (d. 1272 A. D.), whose *Tadhkira* is one of the most famous works in eschatology, based his discussion on Qur'anic verses and "sound" traditions from the ninth century collections, but also added additional material. For example, his book includes an extensive description of the interrogation by Munkar and Nakir, reports about an angel who orders the deceased to record their deeds and gives details about the punishment in Hell and about the names of its layers. Al-Qurṭubī observes that the layers of Hell and the categories of people to be consigned therein are routinely mentioned in the books of *zuhd*, but this material originates in "unsound" traditions.<sup>150</sup> This statement, along with the mention that the Muslim sinners destined to the first layer, will leave Hell by God's intervention, indicates that this is a work of an 'ālim well-learned in religious debates whose purpose was also to reject the most fanciful reports; while doing this, he had to allude to these beliefs and traditions, providing precious evidence about the circulation of this material. Other literary works take

<sup>148</sup>The most significant example is contained in the version mentioned in MS Manchester, John Rylands Library no. 648, in which frequent reference is made to the storyteller (*al-rāwī*). Only one manuscript, MS Paris, Bibl. Nat. 2738, mentions a completely different story using the same title.

<sup>149</sup>See in general A.J. Wensinck — A.S. Tritton, s.v. "Adhāb al-ḡabr," in *EI*<sup>2</sup>. The categories of sinners who are destined to Hell have a somewhat different standing because the Qur'ān mentions that "those who devour the property of orphans unjustly, devour Fire in their bellies, and shall assuredly roast in a Blaze" (Qur'ān 4:10). In some early versions of the story of Muḥammad's ascent to heaven it is said that in the lower heaven (with no mention of Hell) the Prophet saw and described the torments of some sinners (see Ibn Hishām, *Ṣira*, al-Saqqā et al. eds. [Cairo, 1955], vol. 1, pp. 405–6; cf. also Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān* [Cairo 1968], vol. 15, pp. 7, 13). In this regard, the major *ḥadīth* collections include only a brief *ḥadīth* from Abū Hurayra on the usurers; see Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf* (Beirut, 1995), vol. 7, p. 335, no. 36574; Ibn Māja, *Sunan* (Cairo, n.d.), vol. 2, p. 763, no. 2273; Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Musnad* (Beirut, 1991), vol. 3, pp. 269–70, no. 8648; p. 289 no. 8765. Various reports on this subject are discussed by M. Asín Palacios, *La escatología musulmana en la Divina Comedia* (Madrid, 1919), pp. 8–30, 46–52, 357–368.

<sup>150</sup>Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Tadhkira fī aḥwāl al-mawtā wa-umūr al-ākhirā* (Cairo, n.d.), see pp. 124–131, 148–150: on angels; p. 153; pp. 444–449: about the unsound traditions in the books of *zuhd*, and on the names of the layers, traced back to unspecified 'ulamā'; pp. 457–481: description of Hell; pp. 501–508: on the believers who will leave Hell. Similar traditions are included in *al-Durra al-fākhira* of al-Ghazālī; see L. Gautier, *La Perle précieuse de Ghazālī* (Genève, 1878); cf. also *Kitāb aḥwāl al-qiyāma*, *Muhammedanische Eschatologie*, ed. M. Wolff (Leipzig, 1872).

the same direction, discussing certain traditions in which elements common to the story of Jesus and the skull are included, but none mention such elaborate eschatological details as this story does.<sup>151</sup> Nevertheless, traditions corresponding to the contents of the story of Jesus and the skull, describing punishment in the grave and in Hell, must have been in circulation at a popular level, but most probably not before the tenth century. Therefore, they were included only in later versions of the story of Jesus and the skull.

Other internal reasons must have also played a role in the crystallization of this story. The success of the story as a whole, as demonstrated by the multiplicity of versions, must be related to a more appealing elaboration of its literary form and ascribed to its aesthetic qualities. The inclusion of popular themes, such as religious piety and the role of the Prophet, must have contributed as well. With the spread of eschatological traditions, the story acquires not only a religious meaning, but also a more intriguing structure and plot; it becomes a beautiful story. The conclusion, which includes the resurrection and conversion of the unbelieving king, creates a happy end to a plot clearly structured around three themes: the life and death of the king, the punishment of the grave, and the description of Hell. Each of these three thematic units covers more or less the same space. This literary result undoubtedly aimed at pleasing listeners and readers, but it is possible that a beautiful story such as this could also constitute a perfect means for spreading beliefs and defending a Muslim Sunnī identity in polemical confrontations with other religions, as well as within the Muslim community.<sup>152</sup> Religious piety with an edifying purpose and fear of death was shared by most Muslim people, and it is significant that these elements are more conspicuous in later versions than in the early ones. Such is the case, for instance, with the frequent references to the Prophet: the skull starts talking, proclaiming in some later versions his faith in the mission of Muḥammad and pronouncing the *shahāda*.<sup>153</sup> The skull is called back to life at

<sup>151</sup> See for example al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*, vol. 4, pp. 486–488, 514–519; al-Bayhaqī, *Kitāb al-baʿth wa-l-nushūr* (Beirut, 1986), p. 268: on the seven names of the doors of Hell; cf. pp. 269–312: for other particulars about Hell, the heat, the keepers, the snakes, and so forth. See also al-Suyūṭī, *Sharḥ al-ṣudūr bi-sharḥ ḥāl al-mawtā wa-l-qubūr* (Beirut — Damascus, 1986), pp. 74–83: on the visit of the Angel of Death and pp. 162–163: on the names of the angels who interrogated the dead. In the latter passage we encounter the name Rūmān that appears in some versions of the story of Jesus and the skull, but al-Suyūṭī considers this tradition unsound; cf. *al-Munājāt al-kubrā*, p. 64 and MS Manchester, John Rylands Library no. 648, f. 25a; this name already had been included in al-Qurṭubī, *Tadhkira*, p. 126, and in al-Suyūṭī, *al-Budūr al-sāfira fī umūr al-ākhira* (Cairo, 1990), pp. 310–363. Another example of traditions closer to the versions in the story of Jesus and the skull is in the medieval *Liber Scalae Machometi*. See the Italian edition, *Il libro della scala di Maometto*, ed. C. Saccone (Milano, 1991), pp. 86–96: on the description of Hell, and pp. 108–111: on the doors of Hell, including names and categories of the damned.

<sup>152</sup> See Pennacchietti, “La versione neoraramica di un poema religioso caldeo in lingua curda,” and “La leggenda islamica del teschio redivivo in una versione neoraramica.” Pennacchietti points to the existence of Jewish adaptations of the story, substituting Jesus with Moses and Muslim motifs with Jewish ones (see above, n. 14). In the diffusion of popular stories about prophets, the confrontation between believers of different religions must have relied mostly upon aesthetic considerations rather than on theological contents. Along with this, the story was an implicit response to those Shīʿī traditions ascribing the miracle to ʿAlī instead of Jesus.

<sup>153</sup> MS Gotha 2757, 105a; MS Gotha 2736, 2a; with regard to similar declarations of faith,

the end of the story, declaring his faith in God and in Muḥammad's mission.<sup>154</sup> The name of the Prophet is also mentioned in other versions, where it is stated that Muḥammad will be the prophet of the End of Time.<sup>155</sup>

The story thus reached its final structure through a simplified characterization of its meaning around widely shared religious concepts, such as piety, fear of death and devotion to the Prophet Muḥammad — concepts of wide popular attraction, and similar to a certain degree to the devotional attitudes of the mystics, but common to almost all Muslim believers.

It is now time to discuss the wide variation of the versions and the autonomy of each in relation to the others. There can be no doubt: the autonomy of each version is easily explained if oral tradition is suggested as the means of literary elaboration of these later versions. Once the story acquired its final form and all its elements were firmly in place, only oral diffusion can explain such differences and similarities between the versions. They are all intertwined in a way that excludes every possibility of textual transmission. All these peculiarities underline the popular character of the story and fit well with the assumption that it was circulated and elaborated orally. The development of the story around widely shared themes of religious piety favors this assumption. The dramatic structure of the story, such as questions by Jesus and answers by the skull, the schematic use of numbers in the description of the riches and power of the king are well-known devices of oral tales and techniques.<sup>156</sup> Furthermore, a critical attitude towards the activities of ʿulamāʾ, muftīs, and religious authorities also supports the assumption that the story reflects popular feelings.

This profile of the growth and diffusion of the story points precisely to Joseph Sadan's distinction between “*adab* of the élite and *ḥikāyāt*,” the two terms denoting high and popular literature respectively. Adapting this definition to religious literature, I would suggest a diversification between learned literature and *qīṣaṣ* — each one, according to the theory of the various levels explained by Sadan, characterized by written and oral means of diffusion.<sup>157</sup> In the case

cf. MS Damascus, Maktabat al-Asad no. 12685, f. 45b; MS Princeton N.S. Mansell 2160, f. 62b; MS Paris, Bibl. Nat. 3655, f. 110b.

<sup>154</sup> MS Gotha 2736, 7b–8a; MS Milano, Ambrosiana 1161, f. 106a; MS Princeton N.S. Mansell 2160, ff. 82a–82b. With variation, while still maintaining their essential similarity, are the passages in MS Paris, Bibl. Nat. 5616, f. 68b; MS Gotha 2757, f. 107b; MS Paris, Bibl. Nat. 1363, f. 158b; MS Paris, Bibl. Nat. 3652, f. 93b; cf. MS Paris, Bibl. Nat. 3655, f. 115b; MS Berlin Staatsbibliothek We. 1785, f. 51a. The first example of this type is the assertion that nothing is worthier to the believer than the utterance of the *basmala*; see al-Saqṣīnī, *Zahrāt al-riyāḍ*, f. 37a.

<sup>155</sup> MS Paris, Bibl. Nat. 1363, f. 155b; MS Paris, Bibl. Nat. 3652, f. 91a; MS Algiers, Bibl. Nat. 538, 9b; MS Algiers, Bibl. Nat. 728, 45b; MS København, Kongelige Bibl. no. 234, f. 33a; Weil, *Biblical Legends of the Mussulmans*, p. 224; *al-Munājāt al-kubrā*, p. 62; MS Vaticana ar. 1747, f. 145b; MS Milano, Ambrosiana 614, f. 200a; MS Milano, Ambrosiana 1161, f. 105a. See MS Paris, Bibl. Nat. 5616, f. 68a, in which, after the affirmation that Muḥammad will be sent at the End of Time, it is said that the damned Muslims will leave Hell because of his intercession.

<sup>156</sup> Various dramatic tendencies are displayed in the sources. In some cases Jesus listens to the complete story, in other cases the dialogue is almost a cross-talk, and Jesus even breaks into tears. About Jesus' reaction, see, for example, MS Paris, Bibl. Nat. 2761, f. 75b.

<sup>157</sup> See, in particular, J. Sadan, “Hārūn al-Rashīd and the Brewer: Preliminary remarks on



of the story of Jesus' encounter with the skull, the popular oral level has been its peculiar place of elaboration and major diffusion, but the typical interplay between all the different levels left a clear mark. The numerous later versions and the few attestations in learned literature through the ages indicate the penetration of the story from the oral popular level to the written popular and written learned levels, while some of the contents – the destiny of Muslim sinners, the categories of the damned – bear the sign of an introduction of learned theological debates, from written and oral learned levels to written popular (and thus probably also oral) levels. A final consideration regarding the consistency of this oral elaboration and diffusion is that the success of this story suggests that written works, given all the peculiarities discussed, are a scanty attestation of a fairly consistent circulation of oral reports.<sup>158</sup> If this was the situation,

the *adab* of the élite versus *ḥikāyāt*. The continuation of some of the traditional literary models, from the "Classical" Arabic heritage, up to the emergence of modern forms," in *Studies in Canonical and Popular Arabic Literature* (Toronto, 1998), pp. 1–22 and especially p. 6, where a picture of these four stratifications (written *adab*, oral *adab*, written *ḥikāyāt* and oral *ḥikāyāt*) and of their interrelation is given. Particularly with regard to religious literature, a solution of same type has been suggested by A. Rippin, in his recent comprehensive study about the exegetical genre of *al-nāsikh wa-l-mansūkh* ("The exegetical literature of abrogation: Form and content," in *Studies in Islamic and Middle Eastern Texts and Traditions in Memory of Norman Calder*, G.R. Hawting, J.A. Mojaddedi and A. Samely, eds., *Journal of Semitic Studies Supplement*, no. 12 [Oxford, 2000], p. 230). In order to account for the existence of so many works on the topic and their differences, he points out that it is necessary to take into consideration "the audiences for which the material was destined (...). In the field of *tafsīr*, there are two situations which immediately come to mind (...). One is an intellectual situation, located in a scholastic setting (...), the other is a popular situation, where a preacher uses the Qur'ān for edification of his audience." A general portrait of the circulation, relationship and interplay of the various layers of medieval Muslim literature and culture, where most of the bibliography on the subject is mentioned and discussed, is given in B. Shoshan, "High culture and popular culture in medieval Islam," *Studia Islamica* 73 (1991): 67–107; on pp. 83–88, Shoshan characterizes religion as one of two spheres (the other one being literature) of popular culture in medieval Islamic society, and quotes the activity of storytellers who "tended to emphasize elements of Islamic eschatology" (p. 84, quoting the *Kitāb al-quṣṣās wa-l-mudhakkirīn* of Ibn al-Jawzī, ed. M.L. Swartz [Beirut, 1986], pp. 104–6), and the genre of stories of the prophets as one which was used "for education and enjoyment of the masses" (p. 85).

<sup>158</sup> A similar consideration is suggested by U. Marzolph about jocular literature ("The Quran and jocular literature," *Arabica* 47 [2000]: 487), when he concludes that "one has to be aware of the fact that the body of jocular literature as preserved in literature only to a certain extent mirrors anything like oral tradition (...). But even so, the huge amount of jokes in Arabic literature to a certain extent is bound to reflect oral tradition (...). In this respect, the jokes from medieval times preserved in literature are but a faint echo of their former reality." The question of the relationship between oral and written traditions is an intricate one. It is not possible to tell from an examination of popular literature or literature deemed closer to popular taste the extent of elaboration of oral traditions that have been now lost, and the exact relationship of these written versions to those that were orally diffused. In the case of the story of Jesus and the skull, late manuscript versions as a whole point to a wide diffusion of various versions by oral elaboration; all the individual versions do not appear to have been subjected to significant literary elaborations when being written down. Thus, they are probably very close and perhaps identical to the homologous oral versions, but they are to be considered only a partial – or to use the words of Marzolph, a faint – reflection of this oral activity. The substantial diversity of the medium (written/oral) suggests this distinction and prompts to consider the literary forms of this type as expressions of a popular layer of religious literature, closer to oral elaborations of this material, but not coinciding with it. The oral elaborations were probably far wider and richer.

an attempt to look for a kind of first attestation of a defined version to posit at the beginning of its diffusion makes no sense, since a version fixed in one particular place and time or in some literary work, which would have left its mark in at least a group of late attestations, never existed. Consequently, each of the various versions can be considered as the final elaboration of the story of Jesus and the skull in Arabic literature.

### Conclusion

The historical reconstruction of the story of Jesus and the skull has shown that in the first centuries of Islam various literary elaborations of the motif were in circulation. Some of them attributed the miracle to 'Alī rather than to Jesus. The two different stories appear to have been closely related, and this probably influenced the exchange of elements between the various versions, between the ninth and the twelfth centuries. The literary versions attested up to the beginning of the thirteenth century – when 'Aṭṭār wrote his *Jumjuma-nāma*<sup>159</sup> – constitute evidence that the story of Jesus and the skull had not yet crystallized into a unified plot, though the main elements were already present in the various versions. This crystallization occurred later and is reflected in the numerous versions from the sixteenth century onwards, mainly preserved in unpublished manuscripts. Articulated versions such as these must also have been diffused long before this date, most probably through a continuous oral tradition that assured the success of the story throughout the ages.

The crystallization of this story not before the twelfth century, when all the major works of religious literature had been already written, indicates that the diffusion and elaboration of motifs and stories about the prophets was a continuous process, which continued far beyond the so-called formative and classical periods, and even into late medieval and modern times. Many of the later versions demonstrate that the favorite channel of elaboration for this kind of material was the oral tradition, and that these late literary versions are a reflection of the continuous oral development of the stories such as that discussed here. Only in this way can we fully explain the enormous variety of different reports and traditions, which are only hinted at in learned literature, but are fully preserved in later manuscripts.

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<sup>159</sup> On the topic, see Bernardini, "Soltān Jomjome et Jésus le Paraclet" and Id., "Peregrinazioni letterarie turco-iraniche"; Pennacchietti, "Il racconto di Giomgiomé."

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